

USDA FOREST SERVICE
APACHE-SITGREAVES NATIONAL FOREST

GREENLEE COUNTY, ARIZONA

CLIFTON RANGER DISTRICT
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ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS
for
Double Circle
Allotment Management Plan

Responsible Official:

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I. Purpose of and Need for Action

A range analysis was completed in the 1980's on the allotments included in the Double Circle Ranches. Results of the analysis indicated the need for reduced livestock numbers and improved management practices to improve riparian and watershed conditions.

The Double Circle Allotment contains four allotments which total 33,146 acres. This acreage was classified as 18,250 acres (55%) of full capacity range, 3,340 acres (10%) of potential capacity range, and 11,556 acres (35%) of no capacity range.

Forage production and utilization studies indicated portions of the allotment were not being utilized. Improved water distribution, herding, and salt distribution was needed for better livestock distribution to eliminate areas being over-grazed. These studies indicated the estimated grazing capacity to be around 300 to 350 head of cattle yearlong.

An interim management plan was developed in 1985. The plan combined three allotments grazed by the Double Circle Ranch, and a deferred, rest rotation system was developed. A new ranch manager arrived in 1988 and another allotment was added.

Permitted livestock numbers were 515 head to be grazed yearlong. A new owner took over in 1990. Permitted livestock numbers were changed to 400 head in 1990.

A new plan was prepared jointly by the permittee, ranch manager, and Forest Service to comply with Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Input was obtained from the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Local Wildlife Unit Manager, Juan Romero.

The Forest Plan gives direction which is:

To "Provide a program of range management that emphasizes high quality range forage and improvements. Benefits are improved watershed conditions, improved range forage production, improved wildlife habitat, and enhanced visual quality".

An emphasis in the Forest Plan and the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest's Mission Statement is riparian areas. Direction is to reduce adverse impacts....."

Soils are to be managed to maintain or enhance soil productivity and watershed conditions.

The new allotment management plan with proper monitoring and inspections will help accomplish this.

A. BASIC DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

The allotment will be grazed yearlong with a deferred, rest rotation grazing system. It allows for plant rest during spring and summer growth periods.

A main cow herd will be grazed yearlong in six pastures. There are three pastures in the summer range and three in the winter range. Movement dates vary from year to year. Each pasture receives deferment from grazing during both the summer and spring growth periods two out of three years.

Replacement heifers will be grazed with a three pasture deferred, rest rotation system. They will be grazed yearlong in three pastures. Numbers will be approximately 10% of the main herd, or 35-45 head. Bulls will be added during the summer months. Each pasture receives deferment from grazing during both the summer and spring growth periods two out of three years.

Winter grazing of bulls will be in two pastures. They will be grazed with a system designed to provide spring deferment to a pasture in alternate years and complete summer rest every year. Bulls will be with cattle during the summer.

Three holding traps will be used in the spring and fall. In the spring, cattle being gathered will be held for a few days, branded, and moved to summer pastures. In the fall, the traps will be used to gather cattle to separate calves for shipping.

Supplemental and salt blocks will be placed to obtain better livestock distribution into areas receiving low use. It will not be placed within 1/4-mile of water or in riparian areas.

The plan is meant to be flexible. Allowable use is not to be exceeded by 5-10%. Scheduled rest, or deferment, needs to be when plants are actually growing.

Livestock numbers may not match the forage available. Permitted livestock numbers may need adjustment as carrying capacities are validated. The plan states:

"If allowable forage use is exceed by 10%, permitted livestock numbers will be reduced so allowable use can be met. If actual use is less than the allowable forage use by 10%, permitted livestock numbers will be increased so the allowable use can be met".

Allowable Use

Allowable forage use figures will allow for improvement of the vegetation under proper management. The allowable use is based upon achieving scheduled rest during periods of plant growth. The following shows the allowable use established for different vegetation:

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Shrubs and trees in riparian areas | - not to exceed 45%. |
| Desirable, upland browse species | - not to exceed 60%. |
| Desirable grass species | - not to exceed 45%. |

These figures are for easily accessible areas. It will decrease on steeper slopes and areas further away from water. There will be no "sacrifice areas" where forage use exceeds 45% on areas exceeding two acres.

II. Alternatives

Various alternative pasture movements were considered to meet Forest Plan direction. The allotment management plan allows for proper use and recovery of the various vegetation types found on the allotment.

III. Affected Environment

The affected environment is adequately described in the range analysis done for the various allotments combined in this plan. The allotments are Bee Springs, Big Dry, NO Bar, and Water Canyon Allotments.

IV. Environmental Consequences

The management plan accomplishes the protection of riparian areas and soil erosion. This will increase soil productivity and improve riparian conditions. It will help the district meet other objectives in the Forest Plan.

V. Consultation

The plan was developed through consultation with Greenlee County Cattlegrowers and Arizona Game and Fish Wildlife Unit Manager, as well as various resource advisors in the Forest Supervisor's Office.