

Decision Notice & Finding of No Significant Impact

Grazing Authorization and Allotment Management Plans Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland and Weiland Grazing Allotments

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

Background

This decision covers the authorization of grazing for the Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis McFarland and Weiland Allotments in the Sierra Vista Ranger District, Santa Cruz County, Arizona. The allotments are located in the Patagonia Mountains and include portions of Townships 22 and 23 South, Ranges 16 and 17 East. They include lands designated as Management Areas 1, 4, and 7 in the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LMP).

The purpose and need for action arose because the allotment currently lacks sufficient environmental analysis to comply with the rescission Act (P.L. 104-19). In addition, construction of range improvements is needed to improve livestock distribution. In 2005 an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for the proposed action. The EA describes the anticipated effects of the proposed action and two alternatives. It also describes specific mitigation and monitoring requirements that will be implemented as part of the proposal. The EA is available at the Sierra Vista Ranger District, the Coronado National Forest Supervisor's Office and on the Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado/.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, it is my decision to implement *Alternative 3*. The selected action is consistent with the management emphasis and direction for Management Areas 1, 4, and 7 of the Coronado Forest Plan and with statutory and regulatory direction for range management programs (Forest Service Manual 2201.1- 2201.3). The action is described below.

The proposed action would authorize grazing within the following defined limits for the duration, intensity, frequency and timing of grazing.

Duration and timing of grazing. Use on the allotment will be authorized year-round using rotational grazing. Grazing management will be designed to insure that pastures receive periodic growing season rest or deferment in order to provide for grazed plant recovery. The sequence and timing of pasture moves will be based on monitoring of range readiness, ecological condition, and utilization.

Frequency and intensity of grazing. Forage utilization will be managed at a level corresponding to light to moderate intensity (maximum of 45% annual utilization in key areas) in order to provide for grazed plant recovery, increased herbage production and retention of herbaceous litter to protect soils.

New allotment management plans (AMPs) would be developed for the allotments. The AMPs would incorporate an adaptive management strategy under which the number of permitted cattle, season of use and pasture rotations could vary from year to year depending on resource conditions and management objectives.

New permits would be issued for a ten year period. Annual permitted use for each allotment is displayed in the following table. Permitted use reflects the estimated annual forage production (AUMs) available for livestock on the allotments considering the duration, timing, frequency and intensity of grazing proposed.

Allotment	Grazing System	Animal Unit Months	Cattle Yearlong (cow/calf)	Change from Current Permit
Farrell	7 pasture deferred rest rotation	950	60	No change in numbers, 1 additional pasture.
Harshaw	3 pasture deferred rotation	824-1220	52-77 (includes private land permit for 2 horses)	Reduced from 262 yearlings (2515 AUM)
Lewis	4 pasture deferred rotation	348	22	No change
McFarland	3 pasture deferred rotation	238-364	15-23 (includes 3 head private land permit)	Change to a range of numbers.
Weiland	6 pasture deferred rotation	443	28 (includes 5 head private land permit)	Reduced from 37 CYL.

Annual or seasonal adjustments may be made in response to variations in forage or other resource conditions. Initial stocking rates would be set based on existing resource and infrastructure conditions and are supported by production and utilization data collected over the past 4 years (PR Docs. 8, 9, 23-27). Changes in stocking would be based on successful infrastructure development and documented improvement in resource conditions. Specific numbers of livestock permitted will be identified each year in Annual Operating Instructions. The timing of pasture moves will be dictated by utilization monitoring and resource objectives.

Authorized improvements are displayed below. Not all of the projects would be implemented immediately; funding constraints may require the projects to be completed over a period of years, or monitoring may indicate that the projects are no longer necessary.

Allotment	Proposed Improvement	Purpose/Objective
Farrell	One mile of pipeline, one 10,000-gallon storage tank and two troughs in the Best Pasture.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.
Farrell	Cross fence Best pasture (1 mile of fence).	Increase pasture rest and management flexibility by creating an additional pasture.
Farrell	Develop upland waters in upper Best and Corral Canyon pastures.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.
Harshaw	0.6 mile of pipeline from Corral Canyon well to storage and trough in uplands of Bergier pasture.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.
Harshaw	Extend a pipeline from the Weiland Allotment south to the Middle pasture of the Harshaw allotment.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.
Harshaw and McFarland	Extend a pipeline from a well on the Weiland allotment to the boundary fence between the Sorrell pasture on McFarland and the Bergier pasture on the Harshaw allotment. Install 2 drinkers.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.
McFarland	Extend an existing pipeline on the Weiland allotment into the Harshaw pasture on McFarland.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.
McFarland	Construct and enclosure fence on Harshaw creek (Figure 9).	Protect riparian resources by excluding cattle from the creek bed.
Weiland	Increase water storage at East well and extend a pipeline from the well into upland on the Bible pasture.	Improve livestock distribution and reduce use in bottoms by providing upland waters.

Monitoring. Monitoring will be used to determine whether management is being properly implemented and whether the actions are effective at achieving or moving toward desired conditions. Annual utilization will be measured on key species in key areas. Key areas have been established and will be identified the Allotment Management Plans for the allotment. Key species will be native perennial grasses that are palatable to livestock. These may include, but are not limited to, plains lovegrass (*Eragrostis intermedia*), sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), hairy grama (*B. hirsuta*), blue grama (*B. gracilis*), Texas bluestem (*Andropogon cirratus*), wolftail (*Lycurus phleoides*), cane beardgrass (*Bothriochloa barbinoides*), green sprangletop (*Leptichloa dubia*) and three awn (*Aristida sp.*). Utilization will be measured after the growing season; however, grazing intensity will be monitored throughout the grazing period in order to practice adaptive management and make necessary management changes needed for plant development and recovery. The Sierra Vista District Range Staff Officer and the permittees will be responsible for monitoring livestock grazing intensity.

Over time, implementation of the proposed action is expected to result in changes in livestock use patterns. As livestock use patterns change, new key areas may be established and existing key areas may be modified or abandoned.

Long term trend monitoring will include, but is not limited to measurements to track upland range condition and watershed condition (hydrologic function). Techniques may include, but are not limited to dry weight rank, comparative yield, pace transects, Parker 3-step, repeat photography, grazed plant count, Grazing Response Index and clipping and weighing. Permittees will be encouraged to participate in the monitoring activities. Records of livestock numbers, movement dates, shipping records, and rainfall dates and amounts will be kept by the permittee and will be provided to the USFS annually.

Mitigation. To mitigate resource impacts, the following measures will be implemented. These measures have been used on previous projects and are considered to be effective at reducing environmental impacts. They are consistent with applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines and the terms and conditions and conservation measures of existing biological opinions. Implementation of the mitigation measures, in combination with project design criteria, should preclude the occurrence of potentially significant environmental impacts.

Soil, Water and Vegetation – the objective is to mitigate effects of livestock grazing management and to assure that management is responsive to changing resource conditions. The objective will be accomplished through the use of Best Management Practices (FSH 2509.22) and adaptive management. Practices include, but are not limited to the following.

- Utilization of key upland herbaceous forage species in key areas will be limited to 45% of current years' growth by weight, which should achieve the goal of light to moderate grazing as a pasture average. The objective is to protect plant vigor, provide herbaceous residue for soil protection and to increase herbage producing ability of forage plants.
- Prepare annual operating plans with permittees that consider current conditions and management goals. Conduct periodic field checks to identify needed management adjustments, including stock counts, range readiness and utilization monitoring. The objective is to assure achievement of management objectives.
- Necessary techniques will be used to achieve proper distribution or lessen the impact on sensitive areas. Practices include herding, salting and controlling access to waters. Salt will be placed on good feed, one quarter to one half mile from waters and salting locations will be moved annually.

Wildlife and Plants – the objective is to mitigate impacts to wildlife and sensitive plants from livestock grazing and from disturbance associated with construction of range facilities.

- All new or reconstructed water developments will include wildlife access and escape ramps.
- All new fencing will be built to LMP standards (LMP, p. 35) to provide for wildlife passage through the fence. At a minimum, this will be a 4-strand fence with smooth bottom wire 16 inches off of the ground and a total height of 42 inches or less.
- All proposed range facilities will be surveyed for threatened, endangered or sensitive species prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Facilities will be designed and constructed to have no adverse effect on listed species.
- Range construction projects will be designed to avoid the destruction of agaves and disturbance of lesser long-nosed bat roosts. If impacts to agaves are unavoidable, the Forest will insure that no more than 1% of agaves within 800 meters of a project are impacted.
- Within areas meeting the definition of high quality Mearns' quail habitat, herbaceous vegetation will be managed to maintain a minimum of 6 inches of herbaceous stubble height, which is generally interpreted as less than 45% utilization of key herbaceous species with desired use targeted at 35-40% (PR# 32). The objective is to provide herbaceous vegetation as cover for quail and other wildlife.

Heritage Resources – the objective is to protect heritage resources (historic and prehistoric sites) from impacts caused by range construction projects or livestock concentration.

- All proposed range facilities will be surveyed for heritage resources prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Facilities will be built or modified to avoid impacts to sites. If unrecorded sites are discovered during the course of project implementation, activities will cease and the Forest Archeologist will be notified.
- Range facilities, if needed, will be located so as to avoid concentrations of livestock on identified heritage resource sites.
- No salting will occur within or adjacent to identified heritage sites.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives, summarized below. A comparison of these alternatives is summarized in Table 2 of the EA (p. 11) and in Chapter 3 of the EA.

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. 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 allotments.

Alternative 2: Continue Current Management. Livestock grazing would continue on all allotments as currently permitted. New permits would be issued for the classes and numbers of livestock currently allowed. New allotment management plans would be developed and authorized use would continue to

be controlled through annual operating instructions. Existing fences, water developments and other range improvements would be maintained, but no new infrastructure would be proposed or developed.

Reasons for the Selection

When compared with the other alternatives, the selected alternative best meets the purpose and need and achieves desired condition in the following ways.

1. The permitted numbers are within the range of variability depicted in the environmental analysis and are consistent with the calculated capacity on the allotments.
2. The alternative provides for the construction and repair of infrastructure to improve livestock distribution, which will increase vegetative cover and litter accumulation and protect soils.
3. The alternative provides a basis for sharing responsibility for successful implementation of this decision with the permittees.
4. The alternative best achieves the mission of the Coronado National Forest LMP (p.9) to manage for multiple use and sustained yield and to contribute to a viable rural economy.

Public Involvement.

The proposal has been listed in the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions continuously since September 2003. On April 13, 2004, a Forest interdisciplinary team met to develop proposed actions and to identify preliminary issues, concerns and measures to carry forward into the analysis. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping on August 2, 2004 (PR# 10). Seven comment letters were received in response to scoping (PR#s 11-18). Using the comments from the public and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues and concerns to address in the analysis. A draft of the EA was provided to parties who had expressed interest through scoping in September 2005 (PR# 45). The public was also notified of the opportunity to comment through legal notice in the *Sierra Vista Herald and Bisbee Daily Review* on August 31, 2005, and a copy of the draft was posted on the Forest's website during September, 2005. Four responses were received during the 30-day comment period that ended September 30, 2005. I considered all responses received during the comment period and have identified substantive comments (PR#s 47-51).

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the context and intensity of the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

Context: The project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region wide or statewide importance. The discussion of significance criteria that follows applies to the intended action as is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the Sierra Vista Ranger District.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Impacts from this project are both beneficial and adverse. Adverse effects are short-term in nature and will not impair land productivity. Adverse effects have been reduced or eliminated through project design and mitigation measures (EA pp.8-10). The long-term effect of rangeland improvement will be beneficial. My findings are not biased by the beneficial effects of the

action. The EA and project record contain complete discussions of the anticipated effects (EA pages 12-35 and PR Documents 19, 20, 21, 22, 29, 30, 34,41).

2. No significant effects on public health and safety were identified. Proposed developments involve the installation of water storage and distribution systems and approximately 1.5 miles of fencing. These activities are not known to present significant hazards to workers or the public.
3. There are no known unique characteristics associated with the allotments. The only reach of perennial stream in the project area would be excluded from grazing under the proposed action. Therefore, the project will not adversely affect parks, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or other resources considered to have unique characteristics.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. The environmental analysis process has documented expected environmental effects from my decision. These effects have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA and the alternatives have been designed and mitigated to address the various issues raised. The analysis represents the judgement and expertise of resource management professionals who have applied their knowledge to similar projects and resources in the past. While some members of the public are opposed to public lands livestock grazing, this proposal is not highly controversial within the context of the National Environmental Policy Act.
5. The effects analysis (EA pp. 12-35) shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The Forest Service has considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects described in the EA are based on the judgement of experienced resource management professionals using the best available information.
6. The decision to reissue a grazing permit does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Future actions will be evaluated through the NEPA process and will stand on their own as to environmental effects and project feasibility.
7. The cumulative impacts of the action on soils, vegetation and terrestrial and aquatic wildlife resources were considered and disclosed in the EA in Chapter 3. None of the effects are considered significant.
8. The action 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, because none are identified within the project area. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA pp 32-33, PR# 41).
9. Formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (PR# 22, 34) was completed on September 14, 2005 (PR# 34). The Service concurred with the findings of the Biological Assessment prepared by the Forest and concluded that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the lesser long-nosed bat. Terms and conditions and/or species-specific conservation measures from previous consultations are currently being implemented and will continue under the proposed action. The Service has concurred with the resource specialist's determination of *may affect, not likely to adversely affect* Gila topminnow.

and jaguar on all five allotments and Mexican Spotted owl on the Harshaw and Weiland allotments..

10. This selected alternative is in full compliance with all federal, state and local law requirements. The action is consistent with the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Forest Management Act. The Coronado Land and Resource Management Plan was adopted on August 4, 1986 and has been amended eleven times. Forest planning is currently guided by Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 36 CFR 219. The planning regulations state that projects implemented after the LMP is in place must be "consistent with the plan" (36 CFR 219.10 (e)). The term permit grazing authorization and AMP for the Farrell allotment have been deemed consistent with the long-term goals and objectives listed on pages 9-11 of the Coronado LMP, as amended. The LMP identifies large portions of the allotments included in Management Areas 4 and 7 as suitable for grazing (LMP, pages 47-82). There are no identified effects to management indicator species or sensitive species that would affect their Forest-wide populations or long-term viability (EA, pp. 13-22, Project Record #s 19, 20, 21, 22). Other NFMA consistency findings relate to the management of suitable timberlands. The project area does not contain any suitable timberlands; therefore, the other NFMA consistency requirements do not apply.

Endangered Species Act. Formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was completed both as part of the Forest-wide reinitiation of consultation on ongoing and long-term grazing on the Coronado National Forest and at the project level. The conclusions of this consultation (paragraph 9, above) document that the effects of the proposed action are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of threatened, endangered or proposed species.

National Historic Preservation Act. A Heritage Resource Investigation was completed with a finding of no adverse effect on cultural resources.

Executive Order 13186 (Migratory Birds). There are no identified effects on migratory birds, Birds of Conservation Concern and Important Bird Areas (EA, page. 21-22).

Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice). This decision does not impose disproportionately high adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations.

Implementation Date

This project will be implemented no sooner than five business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the notice of decision published in the *Sierra Vista Herald / Bisbee Daily Review*. If an appeal is filed, implementation will not occur sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision on the appeal. Implementation means actually issuing the new permit or accomplishing any ground disturbing actions. Field preparation work needed to implement this decision (e.g., location of monitoring sites and final fence locations, etc.) may proceed immediately.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215 by individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period that ended September 30, 2005. A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed in pursuant to 36 CFR

215. Appeals must be filed (regular mail, email, fax, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeals Deciding Officer and should be submitted to: Appeals Deciding Officer, Jeanine Derby, Forest Supervisor, Coronado National Forest, 300 West Congress, Tucson, AZ 85701, fax: (520) 388-8305, email: appeals-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us (.doc, .rtf or .txt formats only). If hand-delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm), excluding holidays.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed in writing, consistent with 36 CFR 215.14 within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the *Sierra Vista Herald/Bisbee Daily Review*. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely on dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

Relative to issuance of the term grazing permits, permittees may choose to appeal under the regulations listed at 36 CFR 251, Subpart C. The permittee must select which administrative review regulation (36 CFR 215 or 251) he will opt to use, because he cannot use both for the same appealed decision. An appeal by the permittee under the 36 CFR 251 regulations must be filed simultaneously with the Coronado National Forest Supervisor Jeanine Derby (address above) and the Sierra Vista District Ranger, Stephen L. Gunzel, 5990 S. Hwy. 92, Hereford, AZ, 85615, fax: (520) 378-0519 within 45 days of the date of publication of legal notice in the *Sierra Vista Herald/Bisbee Daily Review*.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Stephen Gunzel, Sierra Vista District Ranger at (520) 378-0311 or Rick Gerhart, Analysis Team Leader, (520) 388-8374.


STEPHEN L. GUNZEL
District Ranger
Sierra Vista Ranger District

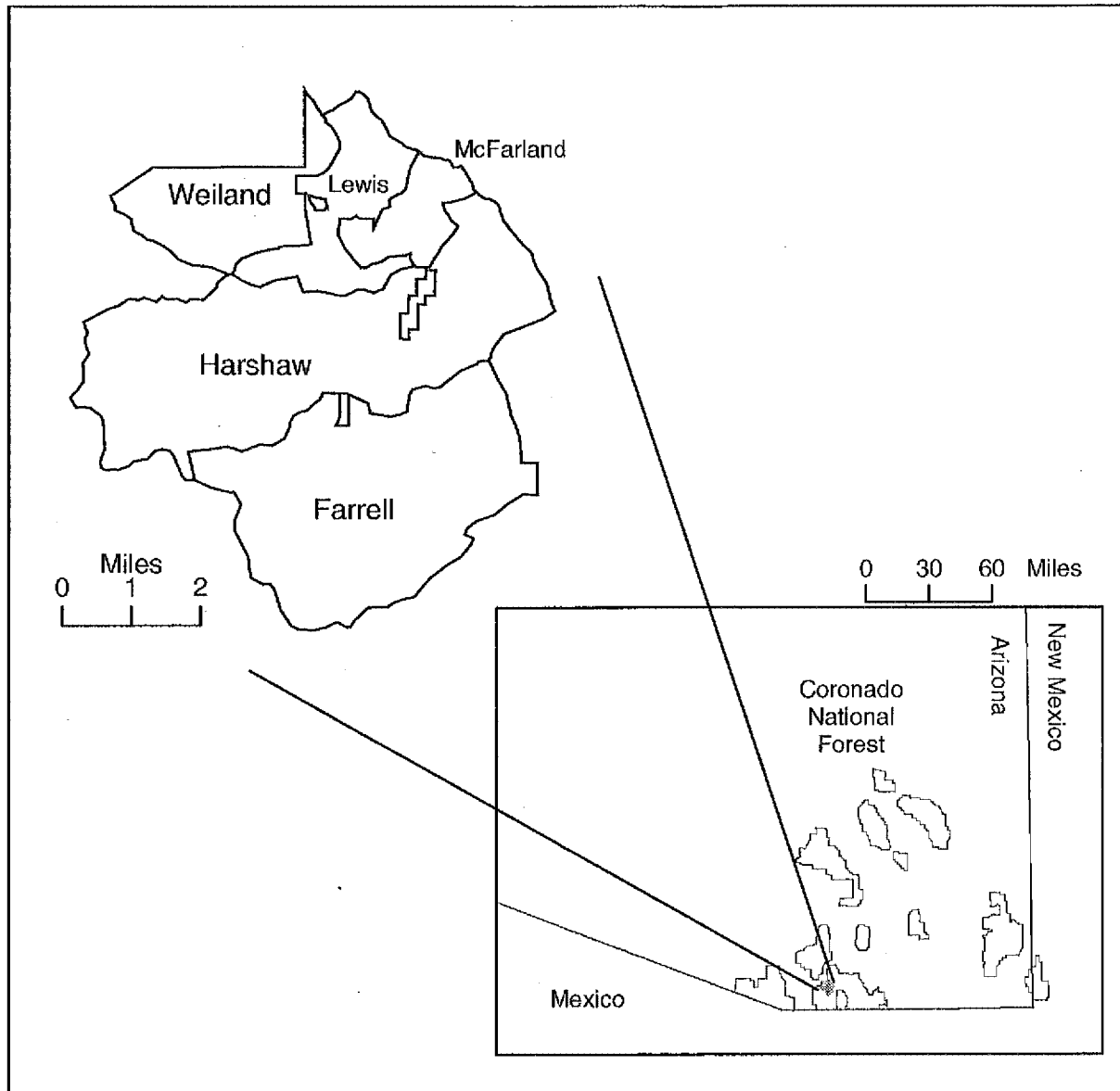
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FIGURE

Vicinity Map

Farrell, Harshaw, Lewis, McFarland, and Weiland Allotments
Sierra Vista Ranger District, Santa Cruz County, Arizona



Legend

— Allotment Boundary

The Forest Service makes no expressed or implied warranty with respect to the character, function or capabilities of the data or their appropriateness for any users purposes; represented features may not be in an accurate geographic location. The Forest Service reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace this geo-spatial information without notification.
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Coronado National Forest
USDA Forest Service

