

ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR

Geronimo Allotment

Douglas Ranger District

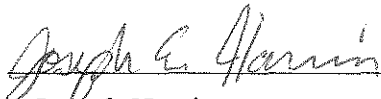
CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST

Prepared By: 

Date: 10/18/11

Steven Bluemer

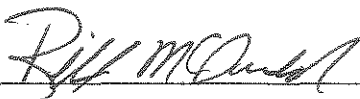
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Recommended By: 

Date: 10/18/11

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Date: 10-18-11

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Date: 10/31/2011

William A. Edwards

District Ranger

Purpose and Scope

This Allotment Management Plan (AMP) will serve to provide the framework under which livestock grazing will be carried out on the Geronimo allotment. This AMP will implement the June 27, 2008 Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact issued by William A. Edwards, District Ranger of the Douglas Ranger District - Coronado National Forest. This AMP will be incorporated into and be considered a part of the terms of the current Term Grazing Permit issued April 2, 2010 and any future Term Grazing Permits that are issued for livestock grazing on the Geronimo allotment. This AMP will remain in effect until it is either revised or replaced with a new AMP created for the allotment.

Allotment Description

The Geronimo allotment lies in the south end of the Peloncillo Mountain range of the Coronado National Forest. It is situated along the Arizona-New Mexico border. The allotment is bordered by the Peloncillo allotment on the east and by the Forest boundary on the west. It is comprised of three large pastures: Sycamore, Estes, and Cottonwood. The allotment consists of 8,370 acres of which approximately 6,164 are considered capable for livestock grazing, or 74%. Roughly 26% of the allotment has slopes greater than 40% and is considered non-capable for livestock grazing. However, the permittee's cattle often distribute themselves on these steeper slopes thus reducing grazing pressure on pasture concentration areas.

Rangeland condition within the Geronimo allotment is fair to good with upward trends. A series of prescribed and natural fires have occurred on the allotment over the past decade and have helped to hold back the encroachment of woody plant species. Additional inventories by a private consultant in 2000 determined conditions to be good to excellent throughout the allotment. Riparian vigor is good in both Cottonwood Canyon and Sycamore Creek. Soil condition is 99% satisfactory across the Geronimo allotment with 1% falling under the impaired category.

Under the Coronado Forest Plan, the entire allotment lies within Forest Management Area (MA) 4, which allows for livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and fuelwood harvest. Although Cottonwood Canyon and Sycamore Creek have riparian species, they are not abundant enough to be classified as MA7, or riparian areas.

Recent Management

A new term grazing permit was issued to the McDonald Cattle Company in April of 2010. This permit authorizes the permittee to graze 177 head of cattle or equivalent for 5.5 months during the period of November 1 through July 15 (up to 980 AUMs).

Present allotment management consists of pushing the cow herd up into the Cottonwood pasture at the beginning of the season. The cattle then drift down into the Estes pasture and end the season in the Sycamore pasture. Generally, the cattle will remain in the Cottonwood pasture from 11/01 – 01/15, the Estes pasture from 01/16 – 02/28, and the Sycamore pasture from 03/01 – 03/31. Due to the fact that the Estes and Sycamore pastures have limited water, the permittee often takes some cattle off Forest early, or comes off early all together.

The following issues were identified during the Environmental Assessment (EA) through field visits to the allotment, discussions with the permittee, consultation with Forest resource specialists, and by soliciting comments from interested publics.

Developed stock water is a limiting factor on the Geronimo allotment. The allotment is watered by three earth dams, three springs, a trick tank, and Swaggart well. The one concrete dam in the Estes pasture is unreliable and the majority of the pasture's livestock water comes in the form of pothole water.

Goals and Objectives

The Coronado National Forest Plan has identified goals for the range, wildlife, soil, water and lands, wilderness and recreation programs on the Forest (Forest Plan pp. 9-11). These goals can be found on page 5 of the Environmental Assessment for the Geronimo allotment published in May 2008.

Based on Forest Plan guidance and site-specific knowledge of the allotment, as well as permittee input, the following objectives constitute the desired condition for the allotment:

- Implement a framework for management that provides the flexibility to adapt to changing resource and administrative conditions.
- Ensure livestock grazing is continued on the Geronimo allotment and that it is in line with the capacity of the allotment.
- Ensure that livestock grazing on the Geronimo allotment is carried out in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, Forest Service policies, the Coronado Forest Plan, and the June 27, 2008 NEPA Decision for this allotment.
- Implement livestock management practices which, under normal climatic conditions, will improve vegetative, soil, and watershed conditions across the allotment to achieve a fair, or better, range condition rating.
- Implement livestock management practices which, under normal climatic conditions, will sustain or improve riparian conditions in Cottonwood Canyon and at any seeps or springs that may have the potential to support riparian vegetation.
- Implement livestock management practices which, under normal climatic conditions, will not have any adverse affects on any endangered, sensitive, and/or management indicator species.
- Livestock stocking is consistent with annual forage production and use is monitored annually. Management controls livestock use and distribution so that sufficient herbaceous vegetation is retained to protect soils and provide herbaceous wildlife cover; zones of heavy use are minimized.
- Ecological sites within the allotment have stable soils, functional hydrology and support functional biotic communities. All areas are in fair range condition or better.
- Lower elevation sites are dominated by warm season native perennial grasses and are increasing in diversity of grasses, forbs and shrubs.

- Within dense chaparral stands, shrub density contributing to poor ecological condition and high fire hazards is reduced and herbaceous cover is increased.
- Native vegetation in evergreen riparian bottoms is a diverse mix of perennial grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees. Trees and shrubs show no evidence of high-lining or heavy browsing resulting in hedging and recruitment is occurring. Riparian bottoms throughout the allotment provide suitable year-round habitat for wildlife species dependant on herbaceous cover.
- Areas of historic heavy livestock use have increasing ground cover and litter and stable soils.
- Occupied habitats for threatened, endangered, sensitive and management indicator species are maintained or improved and recovery objectives are being met.
- All grazing improvements on the allotment are in proper working order and are contributing toward improved livestock distribution and pasture reliability.
- Management plans provide sufficient flexibility to allow management to adapt to changing resource conditions.

Management Strategy

Use on the Geronimo allotment continues to be seasonal (November 1 through July 15, or until the first monsoon rains) to allow for annual summer growing season rest. Spring growing season use will be restricted to one year in three, on average, in order to allow for grazed plant recovery. Pasture rotations will remain the same as current management. The sequence and timing of pasture moves will be based on monitoring of range readiness, ecological condition, water availability, and utilization.

Forage utilization will be managed at a level corresponding to light to moderate intensity in order to provide for grazed plant recovery, increased plant vigor, and retention of herbaceous litter to protect soils and provide forage and herbaceous cover for wildlife. Consistent patterns of utilization in excess of 45% of key species in key areas will be used as a basis to modify management practices or take administrative actions necessary to reduce utilization in subsequent grazing seasons.

The number and class of livestock and season of use will be allowed to vary depending on resource conditions and management objectives, provided annual use does not exceed the total AUMs authorized or the season of use identified for the allotment. Annual adjustments will be documented and authorized in annual operating instructions. Depending on prevailing climate, resource conditions, management needs, and permittee preference, actual use may be less than authorized in some years.

Mitigation

To mitigate resource impacts, the following measures will be implemented. These practices have been demonstrated to be successful when used on similar projects and are considered effective at reducing environmental impacts. They are consistent with applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Best Management Practices and the terms and conditions and conservation measures of applicable U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinions. Implementation of the mitigation measures and design

criteria is intended to preclude the occurrence of potentially significant environmental impacts.

Soil, Water and Vegetation: The objective is to mitigate effects of livestock grazing and facility construction 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 managed to 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. An annual utilization guideline of 30-45% use of key species in key areas will be used to achieve this objective.
- Management practices 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. Placement of liquid or bulk supplements will require prior approval of the District Ranger.
- No hay will be placed on Forest lands in order to minimize the introduction of weed seeds.

Wildlife: The objective is to mitigate impacts to wildlife from livestock grazing and from disturbance associated with maintenance and construction of range facilities.

- All water developments will include wildlife access and escape ramps. Waters will be kept available to wildlife year round if possible.
- All new and reconstructed fencing will be built to Forest Plan standards (Forest Plan, 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.
- Range construction projects will be designed to avoid the destruction of agaves. 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. The objective is to avoid impacts to lesser long-nosed bat and Mexican long-nosed bat food resources.
- All proposed range facilities will be evaluated by a qualified wildlife biologist for effects to 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.
- 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. The objective is to provide herbaceous vegetation as cover for quail and other wildlife.
- The Forest will implement the Forest's Stockpond and Aquatic Habitat Management and Maintenance Guidelines for the Chiricahua leopard frog (*Rana*

chiricahuensis) (PR 49). The objectives are 1) to minimize short-term impacts to frogs while allowing maintenance activities that maintain occupied habitats, and 2) to protect shoreline and emergent vegetation and to improve water quality.

Heritage Resources: The objective is to protect heritage resources (historic and prehistoric sites) from direct or indirect impacts caused by ground-disturbing activities associated with the construction of range facilities and to monitor the effects of cattle grazing on sites to ensure that adverse effects are not occurring. In general, these measures include the following:

- All proposed range facilities will be surveyed by qualified personnel 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 or District 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.
- If impacts from grazing (e.g. excessive trampling, cattle rubbing against and knocking down standing features) are occurring to heritage sites, measures will be taken (e.g. fencing) to protect them.

Livestock Distribution Aids

- Use of salt, protein and other nutritional supplements are encouraged for livestock health and to improve livestock distribution. All supplements will be placed on forage, no less than ¼ mile from water, and away from natural concentration areas such as drainage bottoms, saddles, roads and trails. Supplement locations will be rotated periodically. No hay or bulk feed may be fed on Forest Lands.
- Water may be turned off to discourage livestock use in a portion of a pasture, but must be made available again once livestock leave the pasture if possible.
- New water developments will be constructed in uplands to encourage livestock use out of the bottoms.
- Existing water lots around dirt tanks will be maintained in satisfactory condition to control livestock access to water.
- Regular herding of livestock will be used to improve livestock distribution.

Range Improvement Construction Priority

The Geronimo Allotment does not have any structural range improvements planned. If management actions indicate the need for additional range improvements not listed above, further interdisciplinary (ID) review or NEPA analysis will occur. Based on the results of the ID review, the District Ranger will determine whether further NEPA analysis or documentation is required.

Range Improvement Maintenance

Maintenance of all structural improvements listed in the term grazing permit is the responsibility of the permittee. Likewise, the maintenance of any new improvements as a result of this plan will be the responsibility of the permittee. All improvements must be kept in a serviceable condition. Given the increased probability of both prescribed fire and wildfire in this area for the foreseeable future, special attention should be given to protecting infrastructure from the affects of fire. In particular, fences should be kept clear of brush for 3 feet on either side of the fence and brush should be removed from the area around wooden brace and corner posts. The Forest Service will assist in supplying materials for maintenance needs if budgets allow. The Forest Service will also assist the permittee in planning for potential cost share and grant opportunities whenever possible.

Fires

District wide, there is an effort to re-establish the role of fire on the landscape. Naturally ignited wildfires may be aggressively fought when they endanger life or property. However, when such fires do not threaten life or property they will most likely be fought with a containment strategy, being allowed to burn to the nearest roads or natural barriers. It is Forest Service policy to suppress all unplanned, human caused fires using the most appropriate tactics. Suppression may take the form of direct attack, indirect attack or containment.

Relatively large, prescribed fires will be an important tool in returning a more natural fire regime to the Forest. When planning prescribed fires, the permittee will be consulted, so that they will have time to make adequate preparations for their livestock operation, and so the rotation can be altered to allow fine fuels to accumulate. Burned areas will be allowed to rest for at least one growing season to ensure adequate recovery before livestock will be allowed access. In some cases, more than one season may be required for adequate recovery of forage resources depending on the available moisture. The Forest will coordinate rehabilitation efforts with the permittee in regards to both forage resources and infrastructure repairs whenever possible.

Monitoring

The objective of monitoring is to determine whether management is being properly implemented and whether the actions are effective at achieving or moving toward desired conditions. Two basic types of monitoring will be carried out on the Geronimo allotment in order to implement timely and effective adaptive management.

Effectiveness monitoring includes measurements to track condition and trend of upland and riparian vegetation, soil, and watersheds. Monitoring will be done following procedures described in the Interagency Technical Reference and the Region 3 Rangeland Analysis and Training Guide. These data will be interpreted to determine whether management is achieving desired resource conditions, whether changes in resource condition are related to management, and to determine whether modifications in management are necessary. Effectiveness monitoring will occur at a minimum of five-year intervals, or more frequently if considered necessary.

Implementation monitoring will occur yearly and will include such things as inspection reports, forage utilization measurements in key areas, livestock counts and facilities

inspections. Utilization measurements are made following procedures found in the Interagency Technical Reference and with consideration of the Principles of Obtaining and Interpreting Utilization Data on Southwest Rangelands.

Utilization will be monitored on key forage species, which are native perennial grasses that are palatable to livestock. At a minimum, monitoring will include use in key areas, but may include monitoring outside of key areas. The Douglas District Range Staff Officer and the permittees will be responsible for monitoring livestock grazing utilization. Over time, changes in resource conditions or management may 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 in cooperation with the permittee(s).

Permittees are strongly encouraged to participate in monitoring activities. Records of livestock numbers, movement dates and shipping records will be kept by the permittee and will be provided to the District Range Staff annually.

Travel Management

The administration and operation of this allotment may involve the use of motorized access to some portions of the allotment and the associated infrastructure on either a one-time or a recurring basis. This need for access may be for maintenance of existing improvements or for the construction of new improvements, as well as other logistical needs. Access is usually provided on existing system roads. If access is required beyond that available on existing system roads, it may be authorized on a case by case basis by the District Ranger.