



**DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
GOAT PEAK ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
VERDE RANGER DISTRICT, PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST
YAVAPAI COUNTY, ARIZONA**

DECISION NOTICE

Based upon my review of the Goat Peak Allotment Management Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, which includes the following elements and resource protection measures:

Summary of specific components of Alternative 1, Goat Peak Allotment

Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas of Satisfactory Condition	Stocking Rate	Range Improvements
Logan and Bardshare Pastures using rotational grazing; Cherry Pasture closed to grazing; Goat Peak Pasture already assigned to Bottle Allotment	Upland forage (growing season) – 30-40% Upland forage (non-growing season) – 40-50% Upland Browse – 50-60% Riparian Woody - 20% current growth by weight Riparian Herbaceous – 4-8" minimum stubble height	Ranging from 16 Animal- Unit-Months ¹ (AUMs) in Bardshare Pasture to 40 AUMs in Logan Pasture	Install 0.75 miles of fence at the north end of Logan Pasture to exclude Cherry Creek; redevelop spring improvements at Hance and Bardshare – may include spring boxes, pipeline, troughs, and fencing the spring source.

Allotment-wide Resource Protection Measures

Grazing intensity guidelines will be applied across the allotment to provide rangeland managers with information needed to adapt management through adjustments, as may be needed, on an annual basis. Grazing intensity and forage use guidelines for areas of the allotment that are generally described to be in satisfactory condition are:

¹ Animal-Unit-Month (AUM) is the amount of oven-dry forage required by one mature cow of about 1,000 pounds, either dry or with a calf up to six months of age, or their equivalent, for a standardized period of 30 animal-unit-days.

- Conservative grazing intensity (30-40% use) on key herbaceous species during the spring and summer growing periods (typically April 1 to September 30);
- Moderate grazing intensity (40-50% use) on key herbaceous species during the dormant season;
- Moderate grazing intensity (50-60% leaders browsed) on key upland woody species;
- Four to eight-inch minimum stubble height on key riparian herbaceous species;
- Up to 20% use by weight on current growth for key woody species within riparian areas.

In the event that these resource protection measures do not accomplish site-specific resource objectives, additional optional measures may be implemented. These optional measures will be designed to address site-specific resource concerns and may include, but are not limited to, such things as temporary fencing, electric fencing, drift fences, livestock exclosures, temporary pipelines and water troughs, reconstruction of existing spring improvements and construction of new improvements such as spring boxes and water gaps.

Details of Alternative 1

Adaptive Management

An adaptive management strategy will be implemented. Based on annual monitoring and with consideration of criteria established in the selected alternative, future AOIs may alter the authorized number of livestock, season of use, grazing system or intensity. These actions may be taken, individually or in combination, to provide sufficient growing-season production and reproduction in forage plant species to maintain plant vigor over time and to continue progress toward or maintain desired conditions. Such changes would generally be determined in advance and included in the AOI describing authorized management actions for the upcoming grazing season. These changes will not exceed the limits for timing, intensity and duration defined in the selected alternative. Additional NEPA analysis will not be required to implement these changes which may include the following:

- Modification of pasture rotation system: modification of the order of pasture rotation, growing-season deferment or season-long rest of specific areas.
- Modification of time in pastures: change of the grazing season dates such as delayed or accelerated entry into or departure from seasonal pastures or grazing units.
- Change of livestock numbers: change in authorized livestock numbers for a period of time.
- Modification of grazing intensity: change of the grazing intensity guideline for a pasture or allotment for a period of time.

- Temporary suspension of grazing: suspension of grazing on an allotment needed for protection of key resource values when the measures above are not sufficient.

Authorization

The Verde District Ranger proposes to authorize livestock grazing on the Goat Peak Allotment under the following terms:

- The boundary of the Goat Peak Allotment will be administratively adjusted to close the Cherry Pasture to livestock grazing, while retaining the Bardshare and Logan Pastures. The fence between the two pastures may be removed at some point in the future if it would improve livestock management.
- The Goat Peak Pasture has been administratively assigned to the adjacent Bottle Allotment. The effects of livestock grazing within this pasture are disclosed in the Bottle Grazing Allotment Management Environmental Assessment and resultant decision (November 2010).
- Cherry Creek will be excluded from the northern edge of the Logan Pasture.
- The Logan and Bardshare Pastures will be added to the Cienega Allotment through an administrative action with no resultant change in permitted number of livestock or change in management for the Cienega Allotment.
- Livestock will be managed under a rotational grazing system.

Range Structural Improvements

Adaptive management would allow for the construction of rangeland improvements if they have been identified and are determined, through monitoring, to be necessary for achieving resource objectives. However, if some or all improvements are not implemented, the upper limits of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable.

1. Install approximately .75 miles of new allotment boundary fence, running east-west along the south side of Cherry Creek on the northern boundary of the Logan Pasture. This fence will be in two segments, .75 miles long and 30 feet long, and tying in to natural barriers.
2. Redevelop spring improvements at Bardshare and Hance Springs. This may include spring boxes, pipeline, troughs and fencing of the spring source. Exclosure fencing will be designed and constructed to protect important riparian vegetation while still providing for livestock watering.

Maintenance of Range Improvements: Improvements located within the Logan and Bardshare Pastures will become the maintenance responsibility of the Cienega Allotment permittee and will

be added to their current Term Grazing Permit. Allotment boundary fences located in the Cherry Pasture will become the maintenance responsibility of the adjacent allotment permittee. The permittee is required, as a term and condition of the grazing permit, to maintain improvements at a level that effectively provides for their intended uses and purposes. Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) will identify range improvements in need of maintenance. Existing improvements may be replaced when their conditions warrant.

Access to Improvements: All authorizations for cross-country motorized travel are subject to existing regulations intended to protect natural and/or heritage resources. Cross-country travel is not allowed when such travel would cause unacceptable resource damage.

No need for deviation from the current access needs for motorized use is anticipated on the Goat Peak Allotment. Authorization is provided for the permittee to administer the livestock operation and maintain improvements under the Term Grazing Permit.

Annual authorization for actions implementing management direction in the Allotment Management Plan will be included in the Annual Operating Instructions, such as a description of the anticipated level of cross-country travel, travel needed for the maintenance or reconstruction of existing improvements or the construction of new improvements.

Monitoring

Three types of monitoring will be used - implementation monitoring, periodic monitoring of short-term indicators of resource conditions, and effectiveness monitoring.

Implementation Monitoring: This monitoring will be conducted on an annual basis and will include such things as livestock actual use (# of head, # of months) and scheduled and unscheduled inspections to ensure that all livestock and grazing management measures stipulated in permits, AMPs and AOIs are being implemented (e.g. cattle numbers, on/off dates, rotation schedules, maintenance of improvements, mitigation measures).

Periodic Monitoring of Short-term Indicators of Resource Conditions: Short-term indicators of resource conditions such as forage utilization, residual forage, species composition, plant cover, frequency or density, and/or vegetative ground cover will be monitored on the allotment at key areas and at areas identified with site-specific resource concerns. Methods will include generally accepted monitoring protocols.

The purpose of periodic monitoring of short-term indicators is to determine:

1. If individual plants have had an opportunity to recover, grow and reproduce following grazing impacts.
2. If sufficient residual forage remains at the end of the growing season to provide for other resource values or requirements such as soil productivity, wildlife habitat, and dormant season use.

3. If maintenance or improvement of rangeland conditions are indicated.
4. If management adjustments are warranted for the following season to provide for the physiological needs of primary forage species and other resources identified as concerns.
5. If soils and riparian areas are maintaining or moving toward desired conditions.
6. If critical areas are moving toward desired conditions.

Effectiveness Monitoring: Monitoring, according to a Monitoring Plan to be established in the Allotment Management Plan, to evaluate the success of management in achieving the desired objectives will occur within key and critical areas or on permanent transects at an interval of 10 years or less. Initial baseline information will be collected on this allotment. Effectiveness monitoring may also occur if data and observations from monitoring of short-term indicators suggest a need for additional information.

Decision Rationale

I have selected Alternative 1 because it best meets the Purpose and Need for Action described in the EA, while addressing the multiple use resource needs of the Agency as expressed in the Desired Conditions (page 5 of the EA). Alternative 2 would allow Desired Conditions to be met, but it would not meet the Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands, nor would it comply with Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing, while contributing to the economic and social well-being of people by providing opportunities for economic diversity and by promoting stability for communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood (FSM 2203.1, 2202.1).

The effects of implementing Alternative 1 have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA for Vegetation, Water and Riparian Resources, Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife and Rare Plants, Soil, Recreation and Inventoried Roadless Areas, and Heritage (EA pages 19-36). I have reviewed these findings and conclude that the design of the Alternative and the associated resource protection measures will allow for Desired Conditions to be met and will be in compliance with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan. Alternative 1 provides grazing opportunities for the rancher while providing for protection of important riparian resources by excluding grazing in Cherry Creek. There is also a provision in this alternative to protect riparian vegetation at Hance and Bardshare Springs through fencing if they are redeveloped as livestock watering sources.

The Goat Peak Grazing Allotment Management EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

Public Involvement

The proposal has been listed in the Prescott National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since April 2010 at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>. A letter dated May 27, 2010 describing the proposed action was sent to affected permit holders, members of the public, and non-profit

groups and other entities who have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to state and federal governments and to Native American Tribes interested in activities in the area inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The scoping letter resulted in three responses. The content of these responses was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official. It was determined that the proposed action as designed with included resource protection measures and following Best Management Practices would serve to address any concerns raised through public scoping. No additional alternatives were developed as a result of public scoping.

A cover letter and Environmental Assessment for the Goat Peak Grazing Allotment Management was mailed to 9 individuals, agencies, or groups on November 15, 2010, and a legal notice was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on November 17, 2010 that initiated the 30-day comment period. No responses were received during the 30-day comment period as defined by the publication of the legal notice for comment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

Context

The Goat Peak Allotment is located on the Verde Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest. The allotment surrounds the community of Cherry, approximately nine miles west of Camp Verde, Arizona. The vegetation on the allotment consists of oak and manzanita chaparral with scattered pinyon/juniper woodland, and riparian vegetation in the Cherry Creek riparian corridor.

The original Goat Peak Allotment contains approximately 6,067 acres of National Forest System land in four pastures. The Goat Peak Pasture is approximately 2,729 acres in size and has been added to the Bottle Allotment; the Cherry Pasture includes 1,986 acres; the Bardshare Pasture 357 acres, and the Logan Pasture 995 acres. The total area proposed for continuation of grazing is 1,352 acres with 1,986 acres closed to grazing. The primary watersheds being evaluated for cumulative effects of past, present, and future activities are the Cherry Creek and Upper Verde sub-basins. The Prescott National Forest administers 52% of the lands within the Cherry Creek and Upper Verde 5th level watersheds.

Intensity

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial. Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because rangeland management activities similar to those described in the EA have occurred in this area, as well as over most of the Forest, without incident of issue with public health and safety.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area that includes three Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA): the Black Canyon IRA (128 acres), parts of the Ash Creek IRA (70 acres), and a part of the Grief Hill IRA (872 acres) are in the Goat Peak Allotment. Both the Black Canyon and Ash Creek IRAs are within the Goat Peak Pasture that is not part of this analysis. The Grief Hill IRA is within the Logan and Cherry Pastures. These areas have been identified by the Forest Service as areas without roads where road construction and tree cutting are not currently allowed. The selected Alternative has no provisions for road construction and actions would be in compliance with the Roadless Area Conservation Final Rule (36 CFR Part 294 Special Areas) (EA pages 34-35). There are no designated Wilderness Areas within or adjacent to the allotment. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches occurring within the Goat Peak Allotment. A segment of the Verde River designated as a Scenic River in 1984 is located approximately 20 miles from the allotment. The allotment is known to contain cultural resources of both prehistoric and historic periods. The Forest Service's proposal to continue livestock management is considered to have a no adverse effect on the heritage properties located within the Goat Peak Allotment (EA pages 35-36).

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. This Environmental Analysis is tiered to the Land Management Plan (LMP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Forest-wide effects of LMP's standards were disclosed in that EIS. The selected alternative with the identified resource protection measures considered in the EA meets LMP standards. In addition, extensive scoping was completed during the analysis in order to identify areas of potential controversy. The scoping activities are identified in Chapter 1 and 4 of the EA (pages 5-6, 37, respectively), this Decision Notice, and the project record. There has been no information presented that would demonstrate that the action would cause adverse impacts that could not be mitigated. I conclude that it is very unlikely that the environmental effects associated with the action will be highly controversial.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. This action is similar to many past actions, both in this analysis area and adjacent areas. Effects of this action will be similar to the effects of past, similar actions. Livestock grazing has occurred on the Prescott National Forest for over 100

years. The Interdisciplinary Team that conducted the analysis used the results of past actions as a frame of reference, and combined that insight with scientifically accepted analytical techniques and best available information to estimate effects of the proposal (See EA Chapter 3, pages 17-36).

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because effects of this project are predictable, given that similar actions have occurred in the watershed for many decades. Major follow-up actions will not be necessary. I conclude that this action does not establish precedence for future actions with unknown risks to the environment.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The cumulative impacts are not significant. Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 17-36) discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA and information identified during public review of the EA and given in the Decision Notice, I have concluded that there are no significant, cumulative impacts.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. 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 areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities have been surveyed and contain no known sites or structures that are currently listed or eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act has been completed for grazing and proposed improvements and the SHPO has concurred with the no adverse effect determination on 1/14/2011 (see EA pages 35-36).

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. There are no federally-listed Threatened or Endangered species or habitat within the project area. A Biological Evaluation was completed on 1/03/2011 that documented the lack of species or habitat (Project Record document #40).

Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Chapters 1-3 of the EA (pages 1-36) document the analysis for this project which does not threaten or violate any federal, state or local law imposed for the protection of the environment. This project is fully consistent with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Clean Water Act, and the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976.

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP). The project was designed in conformance with LMP direction concerning resources including range management, soils/watersheds/riparian areas, wildlife/rare plant/fish/aquatic species, and vegetation Management Areas (EA pages 3-5).

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

The National Environmental Policy Act provisions have been followed as required by 40 CFR 1500. The EA analyzed a reasonable range of alternatives, including the No Grazing alternative. It also discloses the expected impacts of each alternative and discusses the identified issues. This document describes the decision I have made and my rationale for the decision.

The selected alternative complies with the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The State Historic Preservation Officer and any potentially affected tribes have been consulted. Clearance for this project has been received, with concurrence by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

Water and air quality standards will be met. There are no classified floodplains or wetlands within the project area.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision would be subject to appeal pursuant to regulations at 36 CFR 215. Individuals or organizations who provide comment or otherwise express interest in the proposed action during the 30-day comment period could appeal. The permittee may appeal this decision under 36 CFR 251. Interest expressed or comments provided on this project prior to or after the close of the comment period do not have standing for appeal purposes. No comments were received during the 30-day comment period that began on November 17, 2010 and ended on December 17, 2010, so there are no parties with standing to appeal as defined by 36 CFR 215. There is no current active grazing permit for this allotment therefore there is no opportunity to appeal this decision pursuant to 36 CFR 251.

Implementation Date

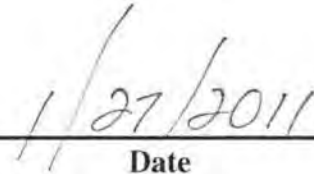
Because there can be no appeals of this decision, implementation may occur immediately after the decision is signed.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Christine Thiel, ID Team Leader, Chino Valley Ranger District, (928) 777-2211.

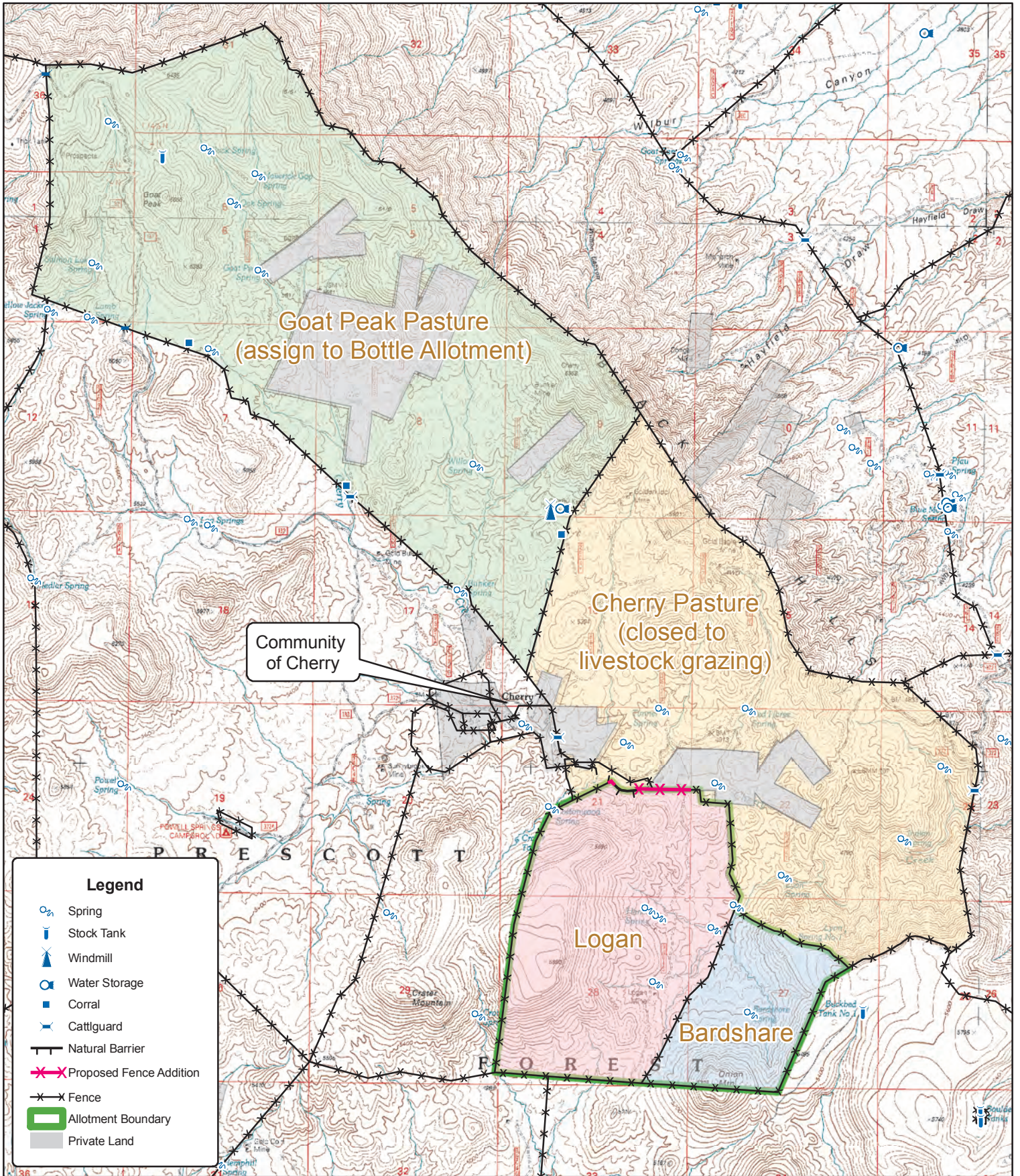


Celeste Gordon
District Ranger



Date

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Goat Peak Pasture
(assign to Bottle Allotment)

Cherry Pasture
(closed to
livestock grazing)

Community
of Cherry

Logan

Bardshare

Legend

- Spring
- Stock Tank
- Windmill
- Water Storage
- Corral
- Cattguard
- Natural Barrier
- Proposed Fence Addition
- Fence
- Allotment Boundary
- Private Land

Goat Peak Allotment

Proposed Action Alternative

Verde Ranger District



1:43,000

Produced on 30 April 2010 - Range



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