



**DECISION NOTICE AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
HITT WASH GRAZING ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT  
U.S. FOREST SERVICE  
CHINO VALLEY RANGER DISTRICT, PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST  
YAVAPAI COUNTY, ARIZONA**

**DECISION NOTICE**

Based upon my review of the Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, which includes the following elements and resource protection measures for the Hitt Wash Allotment:

**Summary of specific components of Alternative 1, Hitt Wash Allotment**

Number of Livestock	Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines
<p>Authorize seasonal grazing from November 1st through April 15th for a range of cattle numbers typically between 64 and 110 adult cattle. Under adaptive management, less than 64 cattle may be authorized in a given season depending on resource conditions and forage and water availability. The total authorization in a given season would not exceed 605 AUMs<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>Dormant season grazing using a deferred rotation grazing strategy. Livestock would be rotated through the two main pastures, North and South, during the seasonal use period. The third pasture, B.Y., would be used for one month during the season, either in November or early December, or mid-March to mid-April to avoid using the pasture when soils are wet.</p>	<p>A management guideline of 35-45% utilization of key forage plants in upland key areas as measured at the end of the seasonal use period;</p> <p>Up to 50-60% leaders browsed on key upland woody species;</p> <p>Minimum stubble height on key riparian herbaceous species: four to six inches where sedges and rushes are key and eight inches where deergrass is the key.</p> <p>Up to 20% use by weight on key woody species within riparian areas; or less than 50% of terminal leaders browsed on woody species less than 6 feet tall.</p>

**Site-specific Resource Protection Measures**

To achieve improvement in soil condition, the B.Y. Pasture will only be grazed for a one month period from either 11/1 to 12/15 or from 3/15 to 4/15. This will minimize further soil compaction by limiting use when soils are normally wet. Additionally, no salting or supplementation would

<sup>1</sup> An AUM is an Animal Unit Month, defined as a measure of the average amount of forage consumed by one cow-calf pair over the course of one month.

occur in valley bottoms to discourage concentrated livestock use. The management objective for TEUI 481 in the B.Y. Pasture is to maintain vegetation cover and spatial distribution and promote retention of litter within the areas between plants on hillslopes, and to improve vegetative cover and distribution and decrease compaction in valley bottoms. Existing gullies in TEUI 481 in both B.Y. Pasture and at the southern end of the North Pasture may be treated by cutting adjacent juniper trees and piling in the gully or using rocks to create small structures to trap and retain sediment. The overall soil condition in the North Pasture is satisfactory; however, there are localized small gullies in TEUI 481 where further degradation could be prevented through gully treatments.

In the event that the above resource protection measures do not accomplish site-specific resource objectives, additional management options may be implemented. These 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, additional livestock enclosures, water pipelines, storage and troughs; reconstruction of non-functional improvements and construction of new improvements such as spring boxes, drift fences, and water gaps.

## **Range Structural Improvements**

The following new structural improvements have been developed to improve grazing management. If some of these improvements are not implemented over the life of the term grazing permit, the upper limit of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable on a sustained basis, or seasonal use periods may be shortened.

- Construct a well in the vicinity of Samson Tank (a currently unreliable water source).
- Change fence configuration between the North and South Pasture to use Rocky Tank as a water source for both pastures.
- Make the existing water haul location in the B.Y. Pasture a permanent water source by drilling a well in the vicinity of the existing storage tank.
- Construct a pasture division fence in the North Pasture that would roughly split the pasture into east and west sections. This would provide for better distribution of livestock and allow for additional deferred rotation opportunities among three main pastures.
- When allotment boundary fences are due to be reconstructed, make sure the new fence is constructed on surveyed property boundary lines and using wildlife-friendly fence design.

## **Other Components of Alternative 1**

### **Adaptive Management**

Adaptive management is designed to provide sufficient flexibility to allow livestock management to address changes in climatic conditions, seasonal fluctuations in forage production, and other dynamic influences on the ecosystem in order to effectively make progress toward or maintain desired conditions of the rangeland and other resources. Under the adaptive management approach, regular/annual monitoring of short-term indicators determines if there is



a need for administrative changes in livestock management. If monitoring indicates that progress toward desired conditions is not being achieved on the allotment, management will be modified. Modifications can include adjustments in timing, intensity, and duration of grazing. Timing is the time of year the livestock are present in a pasture. Intensity is the degree to which forage is removed through grazing and trampling by livestock. Duration is the length of time livestock are present in a given pasture. These modifications would be made through administrative decisions such as: the specific number of head stocked on the allotment annually or in a particular season; the class of animals stocked (cow/calf pairs vs. yearlings, steers or heifers, etc.); specific dates of grazing; livestock herd movement; and periods of rest, deferment, or non-use of portions or all of the allotment for an appropriate period of time, as conditions warrant. Such changes will not result in exceeding the AUMs authorized for livestock use that is included in the selected alternative.

### **Best Management Practices**

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are a practice or combination of practices determined to be the most effective, practicable means of preventing or reducing the amount of pollution generated by nonpoint sources to a level compatible with water quality goals, and are developed to comply with the Clean Water Act (FSH 2509.22\_10.5). The Interdisciplinary Team followed the guidance in the Southwest Region Forest Service Handbook 2509.22, Chapter 20, and the National Core BMP Technical Guide, FS-990a, in the formulation of resource protection measures related to range management that also function as BMPs to address water quality and watershed concerns. These resource protection measures will be implemented in order to comply with the Clean Water Act.

**New Range Improvements:** The list of new range improvements that are authorized for construction is shown on page 2.

**Maintenance of Range Improvements:** The Term Grazing Permit includes a list of all improvements which the permittee will continue to maintain at a level that effectively provides for their intended uses and purposes. Range improvements will be inspected periodically during the term of the permit to document condition. Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) will identify range improvements in need of maintenance. Existing improvements may be replaced as conditions warrant. All improvements identified on allotment maps have been evaluated and determined necessary to the management of the allotment through the life of this plan.

**Access to Improvements:** Authorization for cross-country motorized travel is provided for the permittee to administer the livestock operation and maintain improvements under the terms and conditions of the Term Grazing Permit.

Annual authorization for actions implementing management direction in the Allotment Management Plan (AMP) will be included in the Annual Operating Instructions (AOI), such as a description of the anticipated level of cross-county travel, travel needed for improvement maintenance, new improvement construction, or reconstruction of existing improvements. The permittee may conduct road maintenance activities on forest system roads and trails to facilitate access to or maintenance of improvements. Maintenance will be done to Forest Service standards



and permitted under a road use permit.

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. Approval is granted at annual authorization meetings or on a case by case basis.

### **Monitoring**

In order to evaluate whether grazing management is making progress towards meeting desired resource conditions, two types of monitoring will be conducted:

1. Implementation monitoring will be conducted by the Forest Service, with possible assistance from the permittee, and may include but is not limited to the following: livestock actual use data, compliance with pasture rotation schedules, grazing intensity evaluations during the grazing season (within key and critical areas), utilization at the end of the growing season (within key areas), and visual observations of vegetation and ground cover.
2. Effectiveness monitoring to evaluate the success of management in achieving the desired objectives will occur within key areas at an interval of ten (10) years or less. A smaller subset of key areas may be evaluated that are in the areas needing improvement as identified in the EA. Areas already meeting desired conditions can be visually assessed to determine if conditions are being maintained. Effectiveness monitoring may also be conducted if data and observations from implementation monitoring (annual monitoring) indicate a need. This type of monitoring can include species composition, plant cover, frequency or density, and/or vegetative ground cover monitored at key areas and at areas identified with site-specific resource concerns. Both qualitative and quantitative monitoring methods can be used. Methods for monitoring and inventory that are standard, accepted protocols can be found in the following publications: Region 3 Rangeland Analysis and Management Training Guide (USDA 2013 revised), Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health (Technical Reference 1730-37, 2010), and the Guide to Rangeland Monitoring and Assessment (Smith et al. 2012).

Monitoring activities would be focused on those resources that need improvement or where there is a concern for an important habitat type. For this project, monitoring would be conducted in TEUI map unit 481 in the B.Y. Pasture to make sure that the residual vegetative cover remaining after grazing is sufficient to allow for improvement of the soil resource. Key grazing areas will be visited after the grazing season to monitor utilization levels so that satisfactory vegetation conditions are maintained.

### **Decision Rationale**

I have selected Alternative 1 because it meets the purpose and need for action described in the EA and allows desired conditions to be achieved and maintained over the long term for soils and watersheds while still providing the opportunity to support a local ranching operation. Existing vegetation conditions in upland areas are already satisfactory, and will be maintained by implementing this proposal. The effects of implementing Alternative 1 have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA for Rangeland Vegetation, Soils, Watersheds and Water Resources, Wildlife, Aquatic Species, and Rare Plants; Recreation, and Heritage. I have reviewed these



summary findings in the EA as well as the specialist reports in the project record, 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 while also allowing for improvement of soil and watershed values. This alternative will move resources towards desired conditions or maintain conditions that are already favorable by providing growing season rest, implementing site-specific grazing intensity guidelines, and by authorizing the construction of range improvements designed to improve livestock distribution.

Alternative 3, No Grazing, would also 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 Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management EA and the project record document the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

## Public Involvement

Notice of the intention to initiate the present analysis of the proposed action for this allotment was provided in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/> beginning in January of 2015 and updated regularly. A letter dated 12/19/2014 describing the proposed action was sent to the permit holder of the allotment and to members of the public, non-profit groups, and other entities who have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to State and Federal government entities and to six Native American Tribes interested in activities in the area inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The content of the scoping responses was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official and resulted in the identification of no additional issues for the Hitt Wash Allotment that were not addressed within the design criteria of the proposed action. One additional alternative was developed as a result of public scoping, but it did not change the proposed management for the Hitt Wash Allotment from what was presented in Alternative 1.

The *Environmental Assessment for the Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management* was mailed to scoping respondents and the grazing permittees, and a legal notice announcing the start of the 30-day comment period was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on May 8, 2015. There were six responses received during the 30-day comment period. The responses were reviewed by the ID Team Leader, resource specialists, and the Deciding Official to determine if any new information was received that would have bearing on a decision between the three alternatives. No new concerns were raised by the comments.



## 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 Hitt Wash Allotment is located approximately 15 miles northwest of Chino Valley. The allotment comprises approximately 5,500 acres and has three pastures: North, South, and B.Y. Elevation ranges from about 4,700' to over 5,300'. The topography of the allotment is varied with about 70% of the allotment acreage exhibiting 0-10% slopes. It is these flatter areas that are preferred by livestock.

Vegetation on the allotment consists mainly of pinyon-juniper with chaparral. The understory varies from dense chaparral, to mixed shrubs and grasses, to woodland/grassland mix. Perennial grasses can be locally abundant, especially in juniper woodlands associated with TEUI 481 soil map unit. Important forage grasses on the allotment include blue grama, sideoats grama, threeawns, sand dropseed, and squirreltail.

Precipitation is bi-modal with monsoon events occurring during the summer and a period of precipitation occurring within the winter season with a high degree of variation from year to year. Summer (monsoon) precipitation is highly variable geographically within any season, much more than is the winter. Average annual precipitation across the allotment varies somewhat with elevation and with location and is generally in the range of approximately 13 to 15 inches.

Hitt Wash is the primary drainage passing through the allotment though most of the drainage occurs on private land. It is ephemeral, meaning it only flows for short periods after precipitation events, and it flows to the Williamson Valley Wash approximately 5 miles downstream from the allotment. Williamson Valley Wash flows an additional 15 miles to reach the Big Chino. It is ephemeral through much of this but does have a segment in the middle that is long term intermittent with some perennial springs. There are portions of four 6<sup>th</sup> code sub-watersheds on the allotment, and all are contained within the Williamson Valley Wash 5<sup>th</sup> code watershed.

### 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 issues related to 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. There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) within the allotment and no wilderness areas. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches. The allotment is known to contain cultural resources of both prehistoric and historic periods. The level of need and extent of new field surveys or inspections for grazing impacts will be determined by the Forest Archaeologist. If new surveys are determined necessary, these surveys will be conducted prior to the signing of the NEPA decision. Complete field survey of any given allotment or grouping of allotments will not be required. These procedures comply with the First Amended Programmatic Agreement Regarding Historic Property Protection and Responsibilities between the USDA Forest Service Region 3, the State Historic Preservation Officers of AZ, NM, TX, and OK, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, signed 12/24/2003, and specifically, Appendix H: the Standard Consultation Protocol for Rangeland Management, signed 05/17/2007. A no adverse effect on the cultural resources is based on the Forest Service's proposal to continue the authorization of livestock grazing under an adaptive management system and in a manner consistent with the goals and objectives and the standards and guidelines of the PNF Land and Resource Management Plan. If cultural resources are located where new range improvements are proposed then the resources will be avoided during the implementation of the projects.

**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 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 the EA, 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 that are similar to the selected alternative. 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).

**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 it is a stand-alone decision and each grazing allotment is evaluated independently on its own merits. Major follow-up actions will not be necessary. I conclude that this action does not establish precedent for future actions.

**Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts have been displayed in this analysis in both the EA and in specialist reports contained in the project record. Chapter 3 of the EA discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA, specialist reports, and information identified during public review, 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. Areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities will be surveyed and all cultural resources or historic sites will be avoided. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be completed prior to signing this decision.

**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. The Wildlife, Fisheries, and Rare Plants Report serves as the Biological Evaluation for the Hitt Wash Allotment and documents the effects on species and habitat.

**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. 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, watershed and riparian areas; wildlife, rare plant, fish, and aquatic species; and heritage resources.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were evaluated to determine if further analysis is needed. 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 and 36 CFR 220. The EA 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 (SHPO) and any potentially affected tribes have been consulted. Documentation of surveys conducted for new range improvements that will be implemented within 2 years of this decision will be submitted to the SHPO for concurrence prior to finalizing this decision.

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

## **Administrative Review (Objection) Opportunities**

The Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management project is an activity implementing a land management plan and not authorized under the HFRA and is subject to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

### **How to file an Objection and Timeframe**

Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with §218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Reviewing Officer Teresa Chase, Forest Supervisor, 344 South Cortez, Prescott, AZ 86303, FAX: (928) 443-8008, or electronically at: [objections-southwestern-prescott@fs.fed.us](mailto:objections-southwestern-prescott@fs.fed.us). Electronically filed objections may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html). Please include Hitt Wash Grazing Allotment in the subject line.



Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice in the Prescott Courier. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

At a minimum, an objection must include the following (36 CFR 218.8(d)):

1. The objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
2. A signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection);
3. When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request);
4. The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented;
5. A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and
6. A statement that demonstrates connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection.

Incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in §218.8(b). It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to §218.9. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

The decision is appealable under 36 CFR 214.4(a) by the grazing permit holder only.

## **Implementation Date**

If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day from the close of the objection filing period. When objections are filed, there will be a 45-day period to resolve the objection.



## Contact

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

James Gulsdorf 9-29-15  
Signature Date  
District Ranger

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