



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

DECISION NOTICE

Based upon my review of the Horsethief Grazing 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, Horsethief Allotment

Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas of Satisfactory Condition	Stocking Rate	Range Improvements
Seasonal grazing for up to 182 days between the months of September and April; livestock managed using natural geographic boundaries and available water sources	Moderate grazing intensity (41-50% use) on key herbaceous species during the dormant season; conservative grazing intensity (31-40% use) from September 1 st through 30 th , which is within the summer growing season Upland Browse – 50-60% leaders browsed Riparian Woody - 20% current growth by weight Riparian Herbaceous – 4-6" minimum stubble height where sedges and rushes are key species and 8" where deergrass is key species	Ranging from 450 to 883 Animal Unit Months ¹ (AUMs) for up to 182 days; equivalent to a range of livestock numbers from 106 to 207 yearling cattle for 6 months	Reconstruct 3 to 4 miles of the west allotment boundary fence within the Castle Creek Wilderness; establish a reference soil and vegetation monitoring enclosure in TES 275
Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Site-specific Resource Protection Measures for Areas of Concern			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conservative grazing intensity guideline (31-40% use) during the dormant season on impaired soils and to discourage concentrated livestock use on TES map unit 275. 2. Maintain minimum stubble heights on key herbaceous species at riparian and spring areas in partially functional status (functional – at risk), which includes Castle Creek, Poland Creek, Black Canyon Creek, and lower reach of Turkey Creek. The guideline is to maintain 8" of stubble where sedges and rushes are the key species, and 12" where deergrass is the key species. 			

Other Site-specific Resource Protection Measures

In addition to the site-specific grazing intensity guidelines to be applied in areas of resource concerns, the following will also apply in areas where desired conditions are not being met:

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.

- Evaluate the need for livestock deferment or management adjustments to provide for woody species establishment at times when woody recruitment occurs within Castle Creek, Turkey Creek, and/or Black Canyon Creek;
- Livestock enclosure fencing may be constructed at spring/seep riparian areas if desired conditions are not achieved through management of livestock grazing. Enclosure fencing will be designed and constructed to protect riparian vegetation while still providing for livestock water.

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, additional livestock enclosures, water pipelines, storage and troughs; reconstruction of existing spring improvements, reconstruction of non-functional improvements and construction of new improvements such as spring boxes, drift fences, and water gaps.

Details 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 may suggest the 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 in cooperation with the permittee. Modifications may 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/or 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 and would not change the seasonal nature of the 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, 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.

Authorization

The Bradshaw District Ranger will authorize livestock grazing on the Horsethief Allotment under the following terms:

- A term grazing permit will be issued providing for seasonal livestock use over a range of 450 to 883 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for up to 182 days between the months of September and April. An AUM is defined as the average forage consumed by one cow/calf pair over a period of one month. As an example, this would provide for livestock numbers to range from 106 to 207 head of cattle, yearlings, for six months.
- Livestock will be managed using natural geographic boundaries, barriers, and available water sources.
- Range improvements will be maintained in a functioning condition in order to facilitate livestock management.

Range Structural Improvements

The following structural improvements are authorized for construction as part of the selected alternative. The item listed at #1 is not a mandatory construction activity, but may be implemented as an adaptive management action to improve livestock management and to help achieve resource objectives. However, if this improvement is not implemented, then the upper limits of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable. Item listed at #2 will be constructed once livestock are returned to the allotment and as funding allows.

1. Reconstruct 3 to 4 miles of the west allotment boundary fence with the Castle Creek Wilderness.
2. Establish a reference soil and vegetation monitoring enclosure in TES 275 to determine if site specific management objectives are feasible and being met.

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 when needed as conditions warrant.

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.

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.

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 (pages 3-4 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; Economics; Soils; Water and Riparian Areas; Wildlife, Aquatic Species, and Rare Plants; Recreation; and Heritage (EA pages 22-45). 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 while also providing for protection of riparian resources by implementing grazing intensity guidelines and reducing the stocking rate from current permitted levels. Implementation of conservative grazing guidelines will also allow for improvement of soils and vegetation by providing adequate residual ground cover.

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

Public Involvement

The Horsethief Grazing Allotment Management project 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 July 27, 2010 describing the proposed action was sent to affected permit holders, members of the public, non-profit groups, and other entities that 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 one response. The content of the response 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.

The *Environmental Assessment for the Horsethief Grazing Allotment Management* was mailed to scoping respondents and the grazing permittee, and a legal notice announcing the start of the 30-day comment period was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on August 19, 2011. There were no responses received during this 30-day comment period that ended on September 19, 2011.

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 Horsethief Allotment is located on the Bradshaw Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest. The allotment is located in the southeast corner of the district, approximately 10 miles south of Mayer, Arizona. The vegetation on the allotment consists of Sonoran desert scrub and chaparral in the lower elevations; higher elevations favor pinyon/juniper woodlands with ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir at the highest elevations. Elevations range from 2,900 feet to about 6,500 feet in the Bradshaw Mountains. The primary riparian drainages within the allotment are Poland Creek, Turkey Creek, and Castle Creek. Poland and Turkey Creeks converge to form Black Canyon Creek.

The primary watersheds being evaluated for cumulative effects of past, present, and future activities at the 6th level hydrologic unit code (HUC) are the Black Canyon Creek, Lower Turkey Creek, and Poland Creek 6th code HUCs. The Prescott National Forest administers 80% of the lands within the Lower Turkey watershed, 95% within the Poland Creek watershed, and 37% within the Black Canyon Creek 6th code HUC. The larger 5th level HUC that contains the project area is the Black Canyon Creek 5th code HUC where the Prescott National Forest administers 65% of the lands within.

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) on the allotment. The Castle Creek Wilderness is within and adjacent to the allotment, and makes up about one half of the allotment acreage. The selected alternative provides for grazing at a reduced level of intensity than when the wilderness was designated in 1984. The selected alternative with its resource protection measures and following Best Management Practices will maintain wilderness values. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches occurring within the Horsethief Allotment. A segment of the Verde River designated as a Scenic River in 1984 is located approximately 30 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 Horsethief Allotment (EA pages 44-45).

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 Chapter 1 and 4 of the EA (pages 6-7 and 46, 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 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, pages 22-45).

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 have been displayed in this analysis in both the EA and in specialist reports contained in the project record. Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 22-45) 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, 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 has been completed for grazing and proposed improvements. The SHPO has concurred with the no adverse effect determination, and the Forest Supervisor approved the SHPO clearance on 8/26/2011 (see EA pages 44-45).

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, Fish and Rare Plant Report for the Horsethief Allotment, prepared on 6/27/2011, documents the lack of species or habitat (Project Record document #26).

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 (EA pages 4-6).

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. 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 August 19, 2011 and ended on September 19, 2011, so there are no parties with standing to appeal as defined by 36 CFR 215.

The permittee may appeal this decision under 36 CFR 251. Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 251, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date of the Deciding Officer's written notice of the decision. A copy of the written notice is mailed to the permittee on the date it is signed. Time for filing a notice of appeal is not extendable.

Implementation Date

This decision may be implemented at any time during the appeal process unless the Reviewing Officer grants a stay or unless the grazing permittee appeals the decision and simultaneously requests mediation pursuant to 36 CFR 251.103. In the case of a request for mediation, a stay is granted automatically upon receipt of the notice of appeal and lasts for the duration of the mediation period. A stay may be requested at any time while an appeal is pending.

Contact

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



Linda L. Jackson

District Ranger



Date

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