

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION and
ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLANS
MARIJILDA, HAWK HOLLOW, WHITE STREAKS, & SHINGLE MILL ALLOTMENTS
USDA Forest Service
Safford Ranger District, Coronado National Forest
Graham County, Arizona

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

This decision covers the authorization of grazing and approval of Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) for four livestock allotments located on the Safford Ranger District: Marijilda, Hawk Hollow, White Streaks, and Shingle Mill. An environmental analysis was initiated with the release of a Scoping Report on April 13, 1999. An environmental assessment (EA) was released for public review on August 17, 2000. The environmental assessment documents the analysis of two alternatives to meet this need (three in the case of the Marijilda Allotment), and a no action/no grazing alternative.

The four allotments are located on the north side of the Pinaleno Ecosystem Management Area. They currently cover a total of 55,932 acres with 24,149 acres being classified as capable for grazing. The proposed action would remove 20,311 acres from the allotments leaving a total acreage of 35,621 acres with 20,979 acres being classified as capable for grazing (EA, pages 7-9). Vegetation consists of desert grassland, broadleaf evergreen woodland, coniferous woodland, coniferous forest (transition), coniferous forest (mixed conifer), coniferous forest (spruce-fir) and deciduous riparian (EA, page 7). The allotments are generally in fair to good range condition with static to upward trend (EA, pages 19-26). However, new allotment management plans are needed to reflect biological opinions regarding threatened and endangered species, opportunities to coordinate grazing between adjoining pastures, changes in pasture acreage, and needs to improve livestock distribution (EA, page 2).

Decision

Decision Context: A Proposed Action (see Alternative 3, below) was developed to meet the need for management plans that reflect current resource conditions and opportunities. Scoping and public comment identified four issues related to the Proposed Action:

- Effects to threatened, endangered, or sensitive species or their habitat. Species of concern are the lesser long-nosed bat, American peregrine falcon, Mexican spotted owl, and northern goshawk.
- Effects to wildlife from construction of a water trough on the Marijilda Allotment.
- Effects to economic viability of permittee operations, and returns to the local economy.
- Effects on heritage resources from construction of a pipeline and water trough on the Marijilda Allotment.

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- Change permitted animal months to a range of between 343 and 441 cow/calf animal months (49 cattle from 7 to 9 months, variable season).
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing range improvements.
- Use annual operating instructions to coordinate with burn plans and noxious weed treatments.

The AMP for the **Hawk Hollow Allotment** will:

- Adjust the administrative boundary of the allotment to eliminate steep, upper-elevation areas “not capable” for grazing.
- Adjust the permit numbers and season of use to reflect addition of Cave Canyon Pasture (making a total of three pastures in the allotment) and coordinate grazing with an off-Forest permit (from the current 140 cow/calf animal months November 1-May 31 to 165 cow/calf animal months, November 1-March 31).
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing range improvements.
- Use annual operating instructions to coordinate grazing with noxious weed eradication.

The AMP for the **White Streaks Allotment** will provide for two pastures grazed as a cow/calf operation used for six months (November 1, to April 30), and will:

- Adjust the administrative boundary of the allotment to eliminate steep, upper-elevation areas “not capable” for grazing.
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing pastures and grazing systems (two pastures, grazed by 38 cattle for six months during the winter dormant season, November 1-April 30 [228 cow/calf animal months]).
- Maintain the existing range improvements.

The AMP for the **Shingle Mill Allotment** will provide for six pastures, and will:

- Adjust the administrative boundary of the allotment to eliminate steep, upper-elevation areas “not capable” for grazing.
- Continue the current permitted numbers (990 cow/calf animal months) but coordinate use with off-Forest permits (120 cattle for 6 months, November 1 - April 30; plus 25 horses for 10 months), and continue a private land permit for 5 horses yearlong.
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing pastures, except as described below.
- Maintain the existing range improvements.
- Construct 1.5 miles of fence in the Lower Tripp Pasture to create a new pasture and improve cattle distribution.

Rationale: This decision is supported by the following rationale:

When compared to other alternatives considered in detail, the modified Alternative 3 (Hawk Hollow, White Streaks and Shingle Mill Allotments) and modified Alternative 4 (Marijilda Allotment) provide the best balance between making forage available to livestock operators and improving resource conditions. They will assure that upward trends in range vegetation will continue, at a higher rate than the current upward trend, and provide an extra degree of assurance

- Cattle will be moved into normally dry areas when forage is available and water is present, to reduce grazing pressure on areas where cattle normally congregate.
- Salt and protein supplement will be placed on good forage a minimum of ¼ mile from water, roads, major trails, or other natural livestock concentration areas. Every time salt or protein blocks are put on the allotment they will be put on a different site from the one previously used.
- Best management practices (EA, pages 12-13) for grazing will be used to further reduce environmental affects.
- Range improvements will be located to avoid impacting agaves.

Monitoring: I have selected the key areas for monitoring forage utilization. The key areas were selected consistent with the management guidelines in the Coronado Land and Resource Management Plan on page 22. Key areas may be relocated as needed to best meet the objective of improved rangeland condition (EA, page 8), without additional NEPA analysis. Key forage species selected for monitoring are native perennial grasses that are palatable to livestock. The Safford District Range Staff Officer and the permittee will be responsible for monitoring livestock use to assure that use levels stay below 45% in uplands and 40% in riparian areas. Monitoring of key forage plants in key areas will occur at least once every three years, and will include observations of ground cover and grazed plant frequency. The District Range Staff will develop a monitoring report for each set of data collected. When any single key area reaches the stated use objective, the livestock will be moved to next pasture or off-Forest.

This alternative meets requirements under the National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act and National Historic Preservation Act and their implementing regulations (see below).

Other Alternatives Considered

Three alternatives were considered in detail (four in the case of the Marijilda Allotment). No alternatives were dropped from detailed study. The alternatives considered in detail are briefly described below (also see the EA, pages 11-18). The alternative descriptions below do not reflect the modified utilization limits in the decision.

Alternative 1: No Grazing (No Action)

Under this alternative, use of the grazing allotments by domestic livestock would be discontinued. No term grazing permit would be issued. All existing structural improvements including water developments would remain in place but would not be maintained. Periodic monitoring of structural improvements (at least once every ten years) will be used to determine whether removal or maintenance is needed. Removal or maintenance would be authorized by a separate decision.

Alternative 2: Continue Current Management

The **Marijilda Allotment** contains 14,047 acres, of which 4476 are classified as capable for livestock grazing. The grazing permit expires in 2008. There are seven pastures. Permitted numbers are 30 cattle, yearlong (equivalent to 360 cow/calf animal months). Under current management, the seven pastures are divided into two units, one with three pastures and one with four. In any given year, one unit is not grazed. Cattle are rotated through the pastures within the

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- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing range improvements.
- Use annual operating instructions to coordinate grazing with noxious weed eradication.

White Streaks Allotment:

- Issue a 10-year term grazing permit for the allotment.
- Adjust the administrative boundary of the allotment to eliminate steep, upper-elevation areas "not capable" for grazing.
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing pastures and grazing systems (two pastures, grazed by 38 cattle for six months during the winter dormant season, November 1-April 30 [228 cow/calf animal months]).
- Maintain the existing range improvements.

Shingle Mill Allotment:

- Issue a 10-year term grazing permit for the allotment.
- Adjust the administrative boundary of the allotment to eliminate steep, upper-elevation areas "not capable" for grazing.
- Continue the current permitted numbers (990 cow/calf animal months) but coordinate use with off-Forest permits (120 cattle for 6 months, November 1 - April 30; plus 25 horses for 10 months), and continue a private land permit for 5 horses yearlong.
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing pastures, except as described below.
- Maintain the existing range improvements.
- Construct 1.5 miles of fence in the Lower Tripp Pasture to create a new pasture and improve cattle distribution.

Alternative 4: Coordinated Resource Management; Marijilda Allotment

This alternative applies only to the Marijilda Allotment, and changes the grazing schedule and number of animal months permitted on that allotment. Under this alternative, the proposal for the Marijilda Allotment is to:

- Issue a 10-year term grazing permit for the allotment.
- Adjust the administrative boundary of the allotment to eliminate steep, upper-elevation areas "not capable" for grazing.
- Maintain the existing pastures.
- Change the season of use from yearlong to variable season use (see EA Table 4.C for a projection of use and rest by pasture).
- Change permitted animal months to a range of between 343 and 441 cow/calf animal months (49 cattle from 7 to 9 months, variable season).
- Limit the forage utilization to 45% in upland key areas and 40% in riparian key areas.
- Maintain the existing range improvements.
- Use annual operating instructions to coordinate with burn plans and noxious weed treatments.

7. Cumulative effects of this decision were considered. Cumulative effects, primarily for rangeland vegetation and wildlife, were not deemed significant when added to the expected effects from my decision (EA, pages 11, 21-24, 26-28, 42-43, 47; Project Record, Docs. 59, 61, 62).
8. This decision will have no adverse effect to districts, sites, heritage resources or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (Project Record, Docs. 62 & 78).
9. Findings documented in the Forest's biological assessment for continuation of livestock grazing on the Coronado National Forest determined that the decision will have "no effect" on the Mexican spotted owl, aplomado falcon and jaguar. It is not likely to adversely affect the Chiricahua leopard frog on all four allotments and the lesser long-nosed bat on the Hawk Hollow Allotment. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with these findings in their Final Biological Opinion on continuation of livestock grazing on the Forest on October 24, 2002 (BO 2-21—98-F-399-R1; Project Record, Doc. 106). Formal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was completed based on findings that the decision may adversely affect lesser long-nosed bat on the Marijilda, Shingle Mill and White Streaks Allotments. The Service concluded that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the lesser long-nosed bat or result in incidental take of the species. No terms and conditions to minimize take were stipulated in the incidental take statement.
10. Findings documented in the Interdisciplinary Team Biologist's Management Indicator Species Analysis (Project Record, Doc. 100) show that the selected alternative is expected to maintain or improve occupied habitats for all species analyzed.
11. This proposal is in full compliance with all federal, state and local law requirements. Local and tribal governments were consulted concerning this project.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to issue ten-year term grazing permits and prepare allotment management plans is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages 62-66. The project was designed in conformance with plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for livestock grazing and wildlife (Land and Resource Management Plan, pages 15-23, 31-38, 62-74, 79-82).

National Forest Management Act: The Coronado Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) was finalized on August 4, 1986. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 36 CFR 219 guides Forest planning. The planning regulations state that projects implemented after the LRMP is in place must be 'consistent with the plan' (36 CFR 219.10.e). The term permit grazing authorizations and AMPs for each of the four allotments have been deemed consistent with the long term goals and objectives listed on pages 9-11 of the current Coronado LRMP. The LRMP designated the allotments as suitable for grazing and this area was included in Management Areas 1, 4, 7 and 9 (LRMP, pages 62-82). There were no identified effects to sensitive species that would affect their long-term viability (EA, pages 35-43).

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Relative to issuance of the term grazing permits, the permittees may choose to appeal under the regulations listed at 36 CFR 251, Subpart C. Permittees must select which administrative review regulation (36 CFR 215 or 251) they will opt to use, because they cannot use both for the same appealed decision. An appeal by the permittee under the 36 CFR 251 regulations must be filed with the Supervisor, Coronado National Forest, 300 West Congress, Tucson, Arizona, 85701. The Forest Supervisor's Office contact for 36 CFR 251 appeals is Margaret Walker, Range Program Leader, (520)-670-4561.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Chuck Duncan, District Range Staff Officer, Safford Ranger District, P.O. Box 709, Safford, Arizona, 85548. Chuck Duncan can also be reached by phone at (520) 428-4150 or (520) 670-4715.



GEORGE ASMUS
District Ranger
Safford Ranger District

1-21-03
Date

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