DECISION NOTICE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

GRAZING AUTHORIZATION and
ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
O BAR O CANYON, REDTAIL, & TEN ALLOTMENTS
USDA FOREST SERVICE
CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST
SAFFORD RANGER DISTRICT
GRAHAM COUNTY, ARIZONA

A. INTRODUCTION

This decision covers the authorization of grazing and approval of the Allotment Management Plan for three allotments: O Bar O Canyon, Redtail and Ten Allotments. An environmental analysis process was started for this decision with the release of a Scoping Report on April 12, 1999. An environmental assessment was released for public review on December 9, 1999.

The allotments are located on the extreme southern end of the Pinaleno Ecosystem Management Area on the Safford Ranger District. They cover a total of 21,141 acres with 17,781 acres being classified as capable for grazing. Vegetation consists of desert grassland and broadleaf evergreen woodland (EA, page 5). The allotments are grazed outside the primary grass growing season (approximately November to March) (EA, page 11). The allotments are generally in good range condition with a static to upward trend (EA, pages 13-16).

B. DECISION AND RATIONALE

Decision Context: Prior to making this decision, I reviewed the administrative record, environmental assessment, and public comments received on the O Bar O Canyon, Redtail, and Ten grazing authorization and AMP proposal. The environmental assessment documented a wide range of specific environmental effects of the proposed action, and disclosed that under current management, resource conditions on the allotments have improved. The following text documents my decision and rationale for the O Bar O Canyon, Redtail, and Ten Allotments.

Decision Description: *It is my decision to issue a ten year grazing permit that implements a modified Alternative 2, Continue Current Management/Proposed Action.* This decision would authorize 1100 animal months (Ams) on the O Bar O Allotment, 425 AMs on the Redtail Allotment, and 672 AMs on the Ten Allotment. The selected action (Alternative 2) is within the management emphasis and direction for Management Area 4 of the Coronado Forest Plan and is consistent with all applicable laws and regulations. Our current management of grazing livestock, when the primary grasses are dormant, has been successful in achieving resource condition improvements.

The **O Bar O Allotment** is being managed using a four –pasture rotation system. Two hundred seventy-five cattle are rotated through the pastures over the course of a 4-month winter grazing season (November 1 to February 28). Utilization of key forage species in designated key monitoring areas will

be limited by Annual Operating Instructions to 50% of key forage species in upland vegetation types and 40% of key forage species in riparian vegetation types. The water storage piped from Walnut Springs on the Gilman Allotment will be replaced to assure continued proper distribution of livestock on the O Bar O Canyon Allotment. The replacement tank includes wildlife assess and escape ramps. No other construction or reconstruction of improvements will be undertaken.

The **Redtail Allotment** consists of one pasture that is grazed between November 1 and March. Utilization of key forage species in designated key monitoring areas will be limited by Annual Operating Instructions to 50% of key forage species in upland vegetation types. No new construction or reconstruction of improvements will be undertaken.

The **Ten Allotment** consists of one pasture grazed and component of a modified deferred rest rotation grazing strategy involving lands of other ownerships. A cow/calf operation is used for six months (November 1 to April 30). Utilization of key forage species in designated key monitoring areas will be limited by Annual Operating Instructions to 50% of key forage species in upland vegetation types and 40% of key forage species in riparian vegetation types. Approximately 4 miles of allotment boundary fence maintenance (reconstruction) will be performed to prevent unauthorized livestock use on the allotment. No other construction or reconstruction of improvements will be undertaken.

The selected alternative is responsive to public comment, will meet the needs of the permittees, contibutes to the stability of the economy of Graham and Cochise Counties, and provides for the needs of ecosystem components and functions. This proposal is consistent with the Misssion Statement and standards/guidelines for the Coronado National Forest.

Summary of Decision Rationale: This decision is supported by the following rationale:

(a) The permitted numbers selected are within the range of variability depicted in the environmental analysis conducted for this project;

(b) The decision provides for a new Water Storage Tank at the end of Walnut Springs Pipeline on O Bar O Canyon Allotment to improve livestock distribution;

(c) The decision provides for monitoring of forage use to act as a guide to the Forest Service and permittee in making needed adjustments in annual operating instructions;

(d) The decision limits non-growing season utilization to 50% in the upland and 40% in the riparian vegetative type with grazing use during winter dormant season only;

(e) The utilization levels of 50% uplands and riparian 40% are what could be expected in bad years were forage production is low. During normal or above normal production years, utilization will be 20- 30% or less;

(f) The decision provides for maintenance of permittee income and payments to Graham County; and

(g) The decision provides a basis for sharing responsibility for successful implementation of this decision with the permittee.

In the future, it may be necessary to plan and develop additional livestock and wildlife waters and pasture division fences beyond those currently proposed. Any additional future projects will follow standard agency planning and public involvement processes. Mitigation and monitoring requirements discussed below will be incorporated in the final AMP.

Mitigation: The following mitigation practices will be employed to further reduce potential environmental effects:

a. Cattle will be moved into normally dry areas where feed is availible when water is present.

b. Salt and protein supplement will be placed on good feed 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.

c. A survey for cultural resources and consultation with interested Tribes will be conducted prior to any ground disturbing range improvement projects in order to further check for any unforeseen effects.

d. Prior to any range improvement construction, a project specific survey of endangered, threatened, and sensitive plants and animals will be conducted in order to further check for any unforeseen effects in range improvement project areas.

e. Any new water developments constructed will contain wildlife access and escape ramps.

f. Best Management practices for grazing will be used to further reduce environmental affects.

g. Range improvements will be designed and constructed to avoid impacting agaves.

h. If a *Leptonycteris* roost is found within 1 mile of these allotments, the District shall develop a mitigation plan in coordination with Fish and Wildlife Service.

i. Contribute data as appropriate to the annual report to the Fish and Wildlife Service required by Term and Condition #3 on page 148 of the Final Biological Opinion under consultation number AESO/SE 2-21-98-F-399.

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. The following species of grass have been identified to serve as key species for monitoring: sideoats, hairy gramma, blue gramma, plains lovegrass, curly mesquite, false mesquite and buckwheat. The Safford District Range Staff Officer and the permittee will be responsible for monitoring livestock use to assure that use levels stay below 50%. 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.

C. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCOPING

A Scoping Report was prepared and mailed to interested parties for review and comment on April 12,

1999. Nine comments on the Scoping Report were received and analyzed. Based on the comments and additional information received final analysis adjustments were made. On December 9, 1999, a final environmental assessment was mailed out for public review. The Notice of EA Availability was published in the Eastern Arizona Courier on December 22, 1999. The comment period ran for 30 days until January 22, 2000. Comments were accepted for consideration until January 31, 2000. Eight comment letters were received. An Agency Reponse to Comments was prepared and is attached to this Decision Notice for your information. The response to comments was completed long before this decision was crafted. The response does not reflect my modified decision described above.

D. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Three alternatives were originally considered in the Scoping Report. One alternative was dropped from detail study because it was redundant to Alternative 2 (EA, page 9). The alternative considered in detail are briefly described below (EA, pages 9-12). The alternative descriptions below reflect what was presented in the environmental assessment, but do not relect the modifications to Alternative 2 that are a part of this decision described above.

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/Proposed Action

The **O Bar O Canyon Allotment** is being managed using a four-pasture rotation system. Two hundred seventy-five cattle are rotated through the pastures over the course of a 4-month winter grazing season (November 1-February 28). Moves between pastures occur when utilization of forage species in designated key monitoring areas reaches the utilization levels established in Annual Operating Instructions. Utilization of forage species in designated key areas is limited to 50% in upland vegetation types and 40% in areas with riparian vegetation. Improvements on the O Bar O Canyon Allotment include 18 miles of fence, 11 water sources and 0.2 mile of pipeline. The water storage tank at Walnut Springs on the Gilman Allotment is replaced, to assure continued proper distribution of livestock on the O Bar O Canyon Allotment. The replacement tank includes wildlife access and escape ramps. No other construction or reconstruction of improvements is undertaken.

The **Redtail Allotment** consists of one pasture that is grazed by 85 cattle between November 1 and March 31. Utilization of forage species in designated key areas is limited by Annual Operating Instructions to 50% of in upland vegetation types and 40% in areas with riparian vegetation types. Improvements on the Redtail Allotment consist of 9.3 miles of fence, and 4 water sources. No construction or reconstruction of improvements is undertaken.

The **Ten Allotment** consists of one pasture grazed as a component of a modified deferred rest rotation grazing strategy, using lands of other ownerships. A cow/calf operation is used for six months (November 1 to April 30). Annual Operating Instructions limit utilization in designated key areas to 50% of forage species in upland vegetation types and 40% of forage species in areas with riparian

vegetation. Improvements on the Ten Allotment consist of 18 miles of fence, 13 water sources, 1.5 miles of trail and 0.7 mile of pipeline. Approximately 4 miles of allotment boundary fence maintenance (reconstruction) is performed to prevent unauthorized use on the west side of the allotment, where the fence is down. No other construction or reconstruction of improvements is undertaken.

E. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The following discussions summarize key portions of the environmental assessment.

Key Issues The following issues were developed from scoping activities and interdisciplinary team deliberations (EA, page7).

1. Effects to threatened, endangered, or sensitive species or their habitat. Species of concern are the lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonictorys curasoae yerbabuena*), aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), and American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*).
2. Effects to wildlife from replacement of water storage at Walnut Springs on the Gilman Allotment.
3. Effects to economic viability of permitted operations, and returns to the local economy.

Environmental Effects: The following is a brief summary of the environmental effects previously disclosed in the environmental assessment completed in December, 1999 (EA, pages 12-27).

Alternative 1 - 1. Upland and riparian vegetation will continue to improve slightly faster than Alternative 2.
2. Soil conditions will continue to improve slightly faster than Alternative 2.
3. No impacts to air or water quality.
4. No impacts will occur to sensitive species.
5. Lesser long-nosed bat and Sonora chub will not be affected.
6. No impact to heritage resources or to character of *Dzil nchaa si' an* (Pinaleno Mts).
7. No costs for range improvements.
8. Negative economic effects to permittee and local governments.

Alternative 2 - 1. Upland and riparian vegetation will continue to improve.
2. Soil conditions will continue to improve.
3. No impacts to air or water quality.
4. No impacts will occur to sensitive species.
5. Lesser long-nosed bat and Sonora chub will not be affected.
6. Minimal impact to heritage resources or character of *Dzil nchaa si' an* (Pinaleno Mts).
7. Costs for range improvements on three allotments about $18,000.
8. Positive economic effects to permittee and local governments.

F. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS:

National Forest Management Act: The Coronado Land and Resource Management Plan was initialized on August 4, 1986. Forest planning is currently guided by Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 36 CFR 219. 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 three allotments have been deemed consistent with the long term goals and objectives listed on pages 9-11 of the current Coronado LRMP. The LRMP deemed the Allotments as suitable for grazing and this area was included in Management Area 4 (LRMP, pages 62-66). There were no identified effects to sensitive species that would affect their long term viability.

Other NFMA consistency findings relate to the management of suitable timber lands. The Allotments does not contain any suitable timber lands; therefore, the other consistent check requirements do not apply.

Endangered Species Act: The District Biologist determined that there will be *"no affect"* in all alternatives for all species considered. Informal consultation with U.S. Wildlife Service was conducted throughout the planning process.

National Historic Preservation Act. A heritage resource report was completed and forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Officer for concurrance with that determination. The concurrence was received and is included in the project record. Consultation with Indian tribes was completed.

G. SIGNIFICANCE FINDINGS

Context: This project is a site specific action that by itself does not have international, national, regionwide or statewide importance. The discussion of significance criteria that follows applies to the intended action and is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the Safford Ranger District.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Impacts from this site specific project are both beneficial and adverse. The adverse effects are short term in nature and will not impair land productivity or wildlife's continued existence. The long term effect of continued improvement of the rangeland will be beneficial. The environmental assessment contains a complete discussion of the anticipated effects on pages 12 - 27.

2. My intended action will have no effect to public health or safety.

3. There are no known unique characteristics (such as, parks, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, etc.) associated with the three Allotments.

4. The effects of my decision are limited to the three Allotments. While the environmental analysis process has documented expected environmental effects from my decision, there was agreement by the Interdisciplinary Team that resource improvement trends on the allotment will likely continue.

5. The environmental effects of this decision are typical for this type of agency action. The estimated effects do not indicate any unique or unknown risks to the environment.

6. My decision does not establish any future precedent for other actions that may have a significant environmental effect. Future actions will be evaluated through the NEPA process and will stand on their own as to environmental effects and project feasibility.

7. Cumulative effects to my decision were considered. Cumulative effects, primarily for soils, wildlife and vegetation resources. None of the effects were deemed significant when added to the expected effects from my decision.

8. My decision will have no adverse effect to districts, sites, heritage resources or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Mitigation to protect these resources has been adopted.

9. Findings documented in the District Biologist's Biological Assessment and Evaluation show that the selected alternative will have "no effect" on Threatened and Endangered species and there will be "no impact" to Forest Service Sensitive species. Informal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was completed.

10. This proposal is in full compliance with all federal, state and local law requirements. Local and tribal governments were consulted concerning this project.

Summary: The analysis and other evidence compiled for this site specific project proposal have not revealed any potential for significant environmental effects; therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

H. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project will not be implemented sooner than five business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the notice of decision published in the Eastern Arizona Courier. If an appeal is filed, implementation will not occur sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision on the appeal. Implementation means actually issuing the new permit or actually doing any ground disturbing actions. Field preparation work needed to implement this decision (e.g., location of monitoring sites and final fence locations, etc.) may proceed.

I. APPEAL RIGHTS STATEMENT

If you have concerns with this decision, the 36 CFR 215 regulations provide an administrative appeal process to further review agency decisions. Decisions made at the Coronado National Forest level are reviewed by the Regional Forester (36 CFR 215.12). Any appeal must be filed with the Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, 517 Gold Avenue, SW, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102. The Regional Office Contact for appeals is Patrick L. Jackson, Special Assistant, (505) 842-3305.

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

A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251. The appeal must be filed with the proper Reviewing Official as stated above within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Eastern Arizona Courier.

J. INFORMATION CONTACT PERSON

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

GEORGE ASMUS
Safford District Ranger

MAY 31 2006

Date