


ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN


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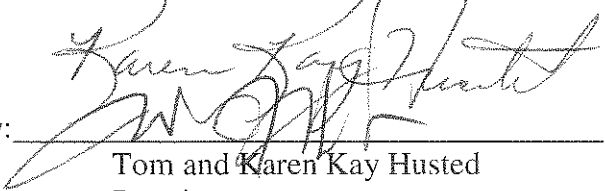
**Pedregosa Allotment**

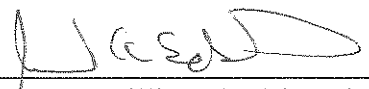
Douglas Ranger District

CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST

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## **Introduction**

The Pedregosa allotment is located in the southern section of the Chiricahua Mountain Ecological Management Area (EMA) of the Douglas Ranger District, in Cochise County. The allotment is located along the southeastern foothills of the Pedregosa Mountains. The allotment consists of approximately 7,955 national forest acres, of which 6,519 acres are classified as capable for livestock grazing.

Most of the allotment is a desert grassland vegetation type, with a madrean encinal woodland vegetation type on the north slopes. A recent assessment of soils indicated 100% of the allotment in satisfactory condition.

This allotment is divided into four large pastures and three smaller pastures and is watered primarily by 7 stock tanks. Over the last several years, only Riddle Tank (125001) in the Indian Creek pasture and an undeveloped seep in the Saner pasture have been reliable water sources. This allotment has frequently been destocked due to lack of available stock water. Excessive use in canyon bottoms due to the lack of available stock water and poor distribution of livestock has been a recurring problem on the allotment.

Range condition was assessed in 2007 and determined to be fair to excellent with upward trends. However, Indian Creek riparian condition was rated poor for vigor. There are no riparian acres designated within the Pedregosa allotment, although there are pockets of riparian obligate species. These riparian species show little or no recruitment in Indian Creek. The Indian Creek pasture shows a higher percentage of annuals in many years, which may be related to poor distribution of grazing impacts throughout the allotment as well.

## **Recent Management**

The Pedregosa Allotment is permitted to Tom & Karen Husted for 196 cow/calf pairs, yearlong; for a total of 3105 AUMs. In addition, a private land permit for 4 horses yearlong is authorized on the allotment. The Husted's have managed this allotment since 1990.

From 2001 to 2010 the actual stocking rate on the Pedregosa allotment averaged slightly over 80 head annually. This resulted in an annual stocking rate 60% less than the permitted numbers. In addition the allotment was frequently de-stocked prior to the end of the grazing season due to the lack of available livestock water or excessive use in the vicinity of whatever water was available. The actual use over this same period was approximately 1,000 AUMs annually which represented about 1/3 of the permitted number of AUMs annually. Even though most of the capable acreage on this allotment has received light use generally, there have continued to be significant areas of excessive use around a few key water sources in the Indian Creek and Halfmoon pastures.

The pastures on the allotment are used in a deferred rotation. The timing and duration of use is subject to water availability in each pasture. During some portion of each year the cattle are moved off of the Forest and placed on the permittees' deeded lands and Arizona

State land. The lack of dependable water on this allotment has routinely resulted in the need to remove cattle from the allotment during some portion of the grazing season.

The permittee runs Red Gyr Brahama, Red Angus, Red Angus/Red Gyr Brahma cross, and a few Hereford cross cattle. Most of the allotment lies within Forest Management Area (MA) 4, where livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, and fuel wood harvest are emphasized.

### **Issues, Concerns, & Conflicts**

The following issues were identified during the Environmental Assessment (EA) through field visits to the allotment, discussions with the permittee, consultation with Forest resource specialists, and by soliciting comments from interested publics:

- The need to provide more dependable livestock water throughout the allotment
- The need to provide better livestock distribution.
- Excessive utilization in the Halfmoon pasture and Indian Creek pasture.

Access on FR 721 has been a problem in regard to the management of this allotment. This is an unimproved road which runs in a northerly direction through the Indian Creek and Halfmoon pastures into the High Lonesome pasture. This road is the primary access point into this area and has significant use by public as well as the US Border Patrol. The gates on FR721 have been difficult for the permittee to keep closed which has limited the effectiveness of pasture rotation schedules. Since this road is unimproved, the combination of relatively heavy traffic and livestock trailing has produced significant erosion damage associated with water drainage from the road.

The lack of dependable water throughout this allotment is a recurring problem. While there are dirt tanks in all of the pastures, they have not provided adequate water on a reliable basis. This lack of dependable water has resulted in excessive utilization in the Indian Creek and Halfmoon pastures. In addition, the lack of riparian recruitment in the Indian Creek pasture is likely a result of the poor distribution caused by this chronic lack of water.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The Coronado National Forest Plan has identified goals for the range, wildlife, soil, water and lands, wilderness and recreation programs on the Forest (Forest Plan pp. 9-11). These goals can be found on page 5 of the Environmental Assessment published in March 2008.

Based on Forest Plan goals and site-specific knowledge of the allotment, the following objectives constitute the desired condition for the analysis area:

- Stocking rate is consistent with annual forage production and use is monitored annually. Management controls livestock use and distribution so that sufficient herbaceous vegetation is retained to protect soils and provide herbaceous wildlife cover; zones of heavy use are minimized.

- Ecological sites within the allotment have stable soils, functional hydrology and support functional biotic communities. All areas are at or moving toward their ecological potential.
- Native vegetation in riparian bottoms is a diverse mix of perennial grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees. Recruitment of young trees is occurring. Riparian bottoms throughout the allotment provide suitable year-round habitat for species dependent on herbaceous cover.
- Areas of historic heavy livestock use have increasing ground cover and litter and stable soils.
- Occupied habitats for threatened, endangered, sensitive and management indicator species are maintained or improved, and recovery objectives are being met.
- All grazing improvements necessary for management on the allotment are in proper working order and are contributing toward improved livestock distribution and pasture reliability.

### **Grazing Strategy**

Permitted numbers are 196 Cow/calf pairs yearlong, not to exceed 3,105 AUMs. Stocking will be limited to 150 head (2,376 AUMs) until water developments are in place. Once improved distribution is demonstrated, stocking would be allowed to increase.

Grazing is authorized on the allotment using rotational grazing in order to incorporate growing season rest or deferment to allow for grazed plant recovery. The sequence and timing of pasture moves and entry and exit from the allotment will be based on monitoring of range readiness, ecological condition, water availability and utilization.

Forage utilization will be managed at a level corresponding to light to moderate intensity in order to provide for grazed plant recovery, increased plant vigor, and retention of herbaceous litter to protect soils and provide forage and herbaceous cover for wildlife. Consistent patterns of utilization in excess of 45 percent of key species in key areas would be used as a basis to modify management practices or take administrative actions necessary to reduce utilization in subsequent grazing seasons.

Annual adjustments will be documented and authorized in annual operating instructions. Depending on prevailing climate, resource conditions, management needs and permittee preference, actual use may be less than authorized in some years.

### **Mitigation**

To mitigate resource impacts, the following measures will be implemented. These practices have been demonstrated to be successful when used on similar projects and are considered effective at reducing environmental impacts. They are consistent with applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Best Management Practices and the terms and conditions and conservation measures of applicable U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinions. Implementation of the mitigation measures and design criteria is intended to preclude the occurrence of potentially significant environmental impacts.

*Soil, Water and Vegetation:* The objective is to mitigate effects of livestock grazing and facility construction through the use of Best Management Practices and adaptive management. Practices include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Utilization of key upland herbaceous forage species in key areas will be managed to achieve the goal of light to moderate grazing as a pasture average. The objective is to protect plant vigor, increase herbaceous residue needed for soil protection and to increase herbage producing ability of forage plants. A utilization guideline of 45 percent use of key species in key areas will be used to achieve this objective.
- Management practices will be used to achieve proper distribution or lessen the impact on sensitive areas. Practices include herding, salting and controlling access to waters. Salt will be placed on good feed, one quarter to one half mile from waters and salting locations will be moved annually. Placement of liquid or bulk supplements will require prior approval of the District Ranger.
- No hay will be placed on Forest lands in order to minimize the introduction of weeds.

*Wildlife:* The objective is to mitigate impacts to wildlife from livestock grazing and from disturbance associated with maintenance and construction of range facilities.

- All water developments will include wildlife access and escape ramps. Waters will be kept available to wildlife year round.
- All new and reconstructed fencing will be built to Forest Plan standards (Forest Plan, p. 35) to provide for wildlife passage through the fence. At a minimum, this will be a 4-strand fence with smooth bottom wire 16 inches off of the ground and a total height of 42 inches or less.
- Range construction projects will be designed to avoid the destruction of agaves. If impacts to agaves are unavoidable, no more than 1 percent of agaves within 800 meters of a project are to be impacted. The objective is to avoid impacts to lesser long-nosed bat food resources.
- All proposed range improvements will be evaluated by a qualified wildlife biologist for effects to threatened, endangered or sensitive species prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Facilities will be designed and constructed to have no adverse effect on listed species.
- Within areas meeting the definition of high quality Mearns' quail habitat, herbaceous vegetation will be managed to maintain a minimum of 6 inches of herbaceous stubble height, which is generally interpreted as less than 45% utilization of key herbaceous species. The objective is to provide herbaceous vegetation as cover for quail and other wildlife.

*Heritage Resources:* The objective is to protect heritage resources (historic and prehistoric sites) from direct or indirect impacts caused by ground-disturbing activities associated with the construction of range facilities and to monitor the effects of cattle grazing on sites to ensure that adverse effects are not occurring. In general, these measures include the following:

- All structural range facilities will be surveyed by qualified personnel for heritage resources prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Facilities will be built or modified to avoid impacts to heritage sites. If unrecorded sites are discovered during the course of project implementation, activities will cease and the Forest or District Archeologist will be notified.
- Range facilities, if needed, will be located so as to avoid concentrations of livestock on identified heritage resource sites.
- No salting will occur within, or adjacent, to identified heritage sites.
- If impacts from grazing (e.g. excessive trampling, cattle rubbing against and knocking down standing features) are occurring to heritage sites, measures will be taken (e.g. fencing) to protect them.

### **Livestock Distribution Aids**

- Use of salt, protein and other nutritional supplements are encouraged for livestock health and to improve livestock distribution. All supplements will be placed on forage, no less than ¼ mile from water, and away from natural concentration areas such as drainage bottoms, saddles, roads and trails. Supplement locations will be rotated periodically. No hay or bulk feed may be fed on Forest Lands.
- Water may be turned off to discourage livestock use in a portion of a pasture, but must be made available again once livestock leave the pasture.
- New water developments will be constructed in uplands to encourage livestock use out of the bottoms.
- Existing water lots around dirt tanks will be maintained in satisfactory condition to control livestock access to water.
- Regular herding of livestock will be used to improve livestock distribution.

### **Range Improvement Construction Priority**

The following structural improvements are proposed in order to improve livestock distribution and pasture reliability.

- Drill a well in the Halfmoon pasture on USFS land to pipe water to the High Lonesome, Halfmoon and Buck Creek Pastures. The project will include 3 miles of pipeline and 3-4 troughs spaced along the line.
- Install a 1,500 gallon umbrella rainwater catchment in the Indian Creek Pasture south of Devil's Dam. Helicopter installation required.
- Installation of Cattle Guards on FR 721 at pasture division fences and at southern Forest boundary fence.

There are currently no non-structural improvements such as brush control measures proposed for this allotment. However, if the use of herbicides could be approved there may be an opportunity to treat approximately 300 acres of mesquite encroachment into the Halfmoon Valley. In addition the repair of erosion and drainage associated with FR721 in Halfmoon and Indian Creek pastures should be accomplished.

If management actions indicate the need for additional physical improvements not listed above, further interdisciplinary (ID) review or NEPA analysis will occur. The necessity and feasibility of the improvement will be analyzed, and the ID review will consider the proposed improvement or improvements and site-specific environmental effects in the context of the overall project. Based on the results of the ID review, the District Ranger will determine whether supplementation or revision of the environmental analysis is necessary or whether further NEPA analysis is required.

### **Range Improvement Maintenance**

Maintenance of all structural improvements listed in the term grazing permit is the responsibility of the permittee. Likewise, the maintenance of any new improvements as a result of this plan will be the responsibility of the permittee. All improvements must be kept in a serviceable condition. Given the increased probability of both prescribed fire and wildfire in this area for the foreseeable future, special attention should be given to protecting infrastructure from the affects of fire. In particular, fences should be kept clear of brush for 3 feet on either side of the fence and brush should be removed from the area around wooden brace and corner posts. The Forest Service will assist in supplying materials for maintenance needs if budgets allow. The Forest Service will also assist the permittee in planning for potential cost share and grant opportunities whenever possible.

While most of the fences on this allotment are maintained in serviceable condition, the fence between the Saner and Buck Creek pastures (125018) is currently in need of significant maintenance.

### **Fires**

District wide, there is an effort to re-establish the role of fire on the landscape. Naturally ignited wildfires may be aggressively fought when they endanger life or property. However, when such fires do not threaten life or property they will most likely be fought with a containment strategy, being allowed to burn to the nearest roads or natural barriers. It is Forest Service policy to suppress all unplanned, human caused fires using the most appropriate tactics. Suppression may take the form of direct attack, indirect attack or containment.

Relatively large, prescribed fires will be an important tool in returning a more natural fire regime to the Forest. When planning prescribed fires, the permittee will be consulted, so that they will have time to make adequate preparations for their livestock operation, and so the rotation can be altered to allow fine fuels to accumulate. Burned areas will be allowed to rest for at least one growing season to ensure adequate recovery before livestock will be allowed access. In some cases, more than one season may be required for adequate recovery of forage resources depending on the available moisture. The Forest will coordinate rehabilitation efforts with the permittee in regards to both forage resources and infrastructure repairs whenever possible.

## **Monitoring**

The objective of monitoring is to determine whether management is being properly implemented and whether the actions are effective at achieving or moving toward desired conditions.

*Effectiveness monitoring* includes measurements to track condition and trend of upland and riparian vegetation, soil, and watersheds. Monitoring will be done following procedures described in the Interagency Technical Reference and the Region 3 Rangeland Analysis and Training Guide. These data will be interpreted to determine whether management is achieving desired resource conditions, whether changes in resource condition are related to management, and to determine whether modifications in management are necessary. Effectiveness monitoring will occur at a minimum of five-year intervals, or more frequently if considered necessary.

*Implementation monitoring* will occur yearly and will include such things as inspection reports, forage utilization measurements in key areas, livestock counts and facilities inspections. Utilization measurements are made following procedures found in the Interagency Technical Reference and with consideration of the Principles of Obtaining and Interpreting Utilization Data on Southwest Rangelands.

Utilization will be monitored on key forage species, which are native perennial grasses that are palatable to livestock. At a minimum, monitoring will include use in key areas, but may include monitoring outside of key areas. The Douglas District Range Staff Officer and the permittees will be responsible for monitoring livestock grazing utilization. Over time, changes in resource conditions or management may result in changes in livestock use patterns. As livestock use patterns change, new key areas may be established and existing key areas may be modified or abandoned in cooperation with the permittee(s).

Permittees are strongly encouraged to participate in monitoring activities. Records of livestock numbers, movement dates and shipping records will be kept by the permittee and will be provided to the District Range Staff annually.

Additionally, species-specific monitoring requirements are in place for Montezuma quail, Goshawk, Chiricahua leopard frog, and Mexican spotted owl, as described in the Grazing Strategy portion of the Environmental Assessment.

## **Travel Management**

The administration and operation of this allotment may involve the use of motorized access to some portions of the allotment and the associated infrastructure on either a one-time or a recurring basis. This need for access may be for maintenance of existing improvements or for the construction of new improvements, as well as other logistical needs. Access is usually provided on existing system roads. If access is required beyond

that available on existing system roads, it may be authorized on a case by case basis by the District Ranger.