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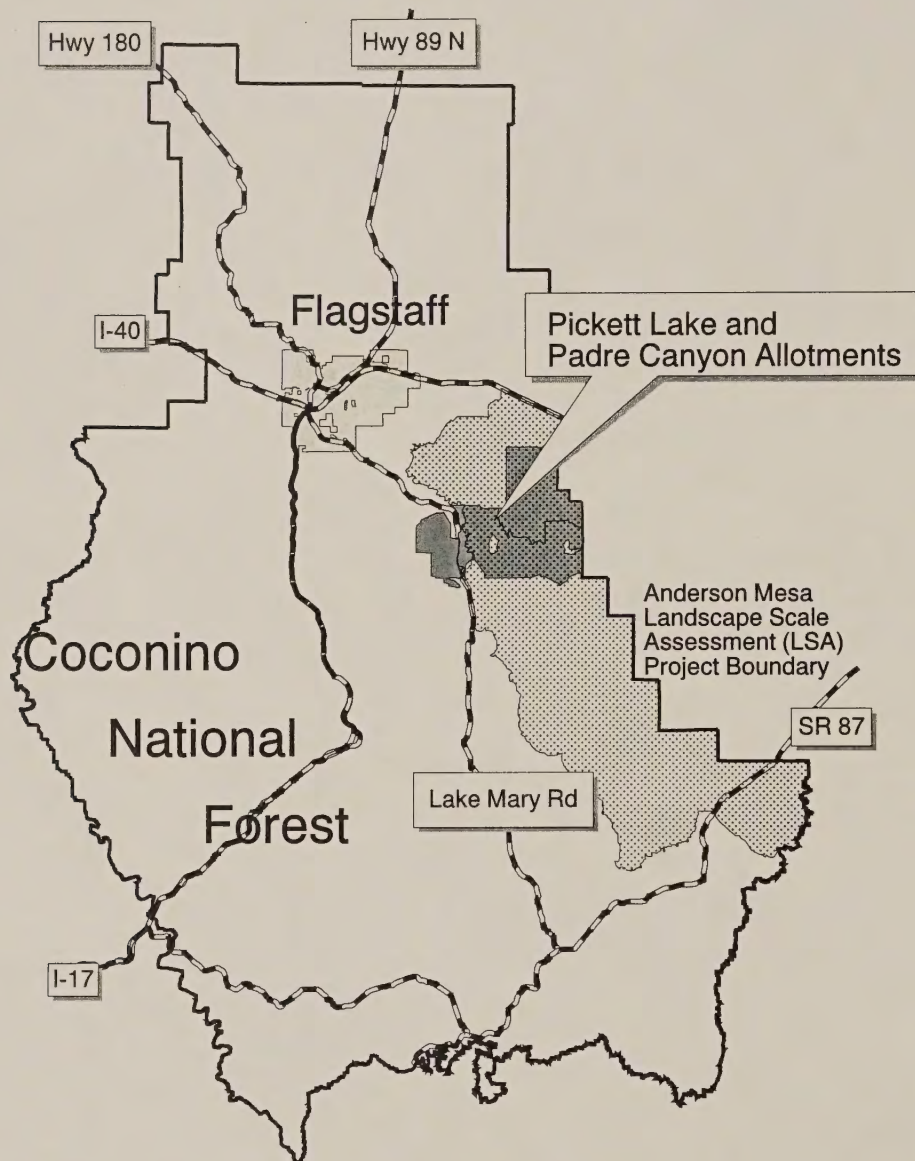


Record of Decision for Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments

Mormon Lake Ranger District, Coconino
National Forest, Coconino County, Arizona



Location Map for Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments



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Background

This Record of Decision documents my decision for the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon cattle grazing allotments, located approximately 9 miles southeast of Flagstaff, Arizona. These allotments lie in the eastern portion of the Mormon Lake Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest.

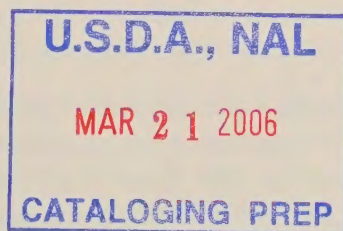
The Pickett Lake Allotment runs from the eastern boundary of the Coconino National Forest below the Anderson Mesa rim, up the Anderson Mesa rim, and approximately 3 miles west of Forest Highway 3 (Lake Mary Road) between Upper Lake Mary and Mormon Lake. The Padre Canyon Allotment runs along the eastern edge of the Coconino National Forest boundary from the Pickett Lake Allotment on the south end to 3 miles south of the Twin Arrows/I-40 Highway junction on the north end. Refer to the location map.

The Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments consist of 34,814 and 20,993 acres, respectively. The allotments are located within all or portions of T20N, R10E, Sections 7-10, 15-22, 27-35; T19N, R10E, Sections 1-36; T19N, R9E, Sections 1-36; T19N, R8E, Sections 12-14, 23, 24; and T18N, R10E, Sections 1-3; T18N, R9E, Sections 4-5.

The Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments were scheduled for an environmental analysis of cattle grazing use on the Coconino National Forest, as required by the Burns Amendment (1995). This project was first initiated in December 2000 as an environmental impact statement (EIS) and the proposed action included cattle grazing, pinyon and juniper tree cutting, and broadcast burning. After public scoping and comment, the Forest Service decided to narrow the scope of the project to analyze only cattle grazing under an environmental assessment (EA). A revised proposed action was presented in August 2002 and a draft EA published in July 2003. However, based on controversy over the effects of cattle grazing on pronghorn habitat on the Anderson Mesa portion of these two allotments, I re-initiated this analysis as an EIS. The two significant issues (wetlands and utilization levels) identified during the draft EA comment period led to the development of Alternative 3 (Proposed Action) and Alternative 4 in the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).

The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether or not to continue cattle grazing on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments. There is a need to maintain and/or improve rangeland conditions and to maintain and protect seasonal and semipermanent wetlands with emergent vegetation on the two allotments. Each of these needs responds to direction from the Forest Plan. There is also a need to maintain the permittee's access to their water right and consider current water claims within the allotments, as per Arizona State law. New fencing and water installation is also needed for better cattle distribution on these allotments.

A project record document (PRD), located at the Peaks Ranger District, contains supporting and reference materials to this Record of Decision.



Decision

After considering information provided in the final environmental impact statement (FEIS), substantive comments received from the public, review of the DEIS, and internal Forest Service specialist input, **I have selected Alternative 3 for the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments.**

Specifically, Alternative 3 will authorize cattle grazing on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments through a term grazing permit for 913 cattle between June 1 and September 30. There would be a 35 percent *utilization* guideline by cattle and/or wildlife. There would be a “moderate” seasonal utilization guideline which is measured before the end of the growing season and is used when determining pasture moves. Cattle will move from one pasture to another when seasonal utilization approaches a “moderate” level, approximately 21-50 percent.

In addition, the following activities would be implemented under Alternative 3:

Fence seasonal and semipermanent wetlands and provide lanes to access water in stock tanks: Exclosure fences will be built to protect the hardstem bulrush and surrounding upland buffer at Post and Perry Lakes from cattle grazing, with a lane to the stock tank water accessing the permittee’s water right at Perry Lake. Two short forest system road segments will be obliterated to construct these fences. Exclosure fences will also be built around the emergent vegetation and surrounding upland buffer at Ducknest and Indian Tank Lakes, with a lane to the stock tank water accessing with the permittee’s filed water claim at Indian Tank Lake.

Alternative 3 incorporates an adaptive management option to fence Boot, Breezy, West Breezy and Indian Lakes, with a lane accessing stock tank waters associated with the permittee’s current water claims at Boot and Indian Lakes. There are two triggers for implementing this option. One is monitoring for condition and trend in the upland vegetation on Padre Canyon Allotment, Railroad, Ducknest, Morgan, and Woodland pastures to determine if they are being used too much at the same time of year, year after year. If monitoring indicates a downward trend in native plant community abundance and diversity in these pastures, then these wetlands will be fenced. The second trigger is if the permittee requests increased flexibility in pasture rotations, then these wetlands would be fenced. Boot and Breezy pastures would only be grazed from June 1st to July 15th if the Boot, Breezy, West Breezy and Indian Lake exclosures around the emergent vegetation and surrounding upland buffer are built.

Possible fencing of Boot and Billy Back Springs: Another adaptive management option is to fence two springs, Boot and Billy Back. Cattle would be managed in the Elliott Driveway pasture where these springs are located to move through quickly (driveway). If the cattle are driven through the pasture, it is anticipated that the emergent and woody vegetation at these springs will be minimally affected. However, if cattle graze results in over a 20 percent or higher utilization on emergent and woody vegetation at these springs, fencing would be constructed by the permittee to exclude cattle.

Create additional waters to improve distribution of grazing animals: Four miles of pipeline (connected to wells on private land) and five drinkers will be constructed to improve water distribution below the Anderson Mesa rim on the Padre Canyon Allotment.

Grazing strategy: Cattle on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments will be reduced 14 percent from current management by combining the two allotments and shortening the grazing season to run from June 1st to September 30th. Combining the allotments will reduce the pasture graze periods from 5 to approximately 3 months above the Anderson Mesa rim and from 5 to approximately 1 month below the rim. Table 6 (FEIS, Chapter 2) provides a summary and comparison between Alternative 3 and Alternative 1 (current management).

No cattle grazing would be authorized between May 1st and May 31st. Grazing rotations will be adjusted so that cattle do not graze on seasonal wetlands containing emergent vegetation from June 1st to July 15th. The enclosure fences will protect four, and possibly eight wetlands (except for lanes), yearlong from cattle grazing.

Structural and nonstructural improvements: Up to one and a half miles of fence, in sections, will be constructed along the Anderson Mesa rim to keep cattle from moving past the rim (including the possibility of fencing the two springs), and for a small holding pasture in the western corner of the Elliot Driveway pasture. These fence segments, along with the proposed wetland enclosure fences, pipeline, drinkers, and grazing strategy (described above), will contribute toward improving the distribution of cattle.

Rationale

I selected Alternative 3 because cattle grazing is a legitimate use of National Forest System lands and through this analysis, it demonstrates that cattle grazing can be managed in these allotments along with other resources (i.e. wetlands, wildlife, vegetation, soils, water quality). Thus, I did not select Alternative 2 (no grazing). I felt Alternative 3 best manages riparian areas in comparison with Alternative 1. Providing yearlong protection to four, and possibly eight seasonal and semipermanent wetlands, will exceed Forest Plan riparian direction and protect the best riparian nesting habitat for waterfowl in the Pickett Lake Allotment. Seasonal wetlands that are not fenced will still be grazed by cattle after July 15th which is a change that was initiated 2 years ago. Reviewing condition and trend monitoring and considering changes in the grazing system (reduced graze, increase in pasture rest, combining into one herd), I felt that the 35 percent utilization guideline was appropriate and there was not the need to use a 20 percent utilization guideline (Alternative 4). Alternative 3 ensures a 35 percent or less utilization in the Mexican spotted owl PAC (7 acres) and there is a 20 percent utilization limit on Boot and Billy Back Springs. My rationale for selecting Alternative 3 integrates the following:

Maintaining and/or improving rangeland conditions where cattle grazing occurs:

Rangeland condition is a comparison of existing vegetation and soil conditions to either the potential natural community or desired plant community. Rangeland management status is considered to be in satisfactory condition when the existing vegetation community is similar to the desired condition, or short-term objectives are being achieved to move the rangeland toward desired conditions.

Condition and trend monitoring determines the effectiveness of the allotment management plan, and long-term range and watershed trends. Contributing information to the condition and trend monitoring are rangeland utilization, soil and riparian condition, forage production, range readiness, and climate. (Refer to FEIS, Chapter 3, "Vegetation" & Chapter 4, "Monitoring" and PRD 54 includes Forest Plan standards applicable to rangeland condition).

- Alternative 3 will improve the rangeland condition for vegetation and soils where they are fenced in seasonal and semipermanent wetlands. This would likely result in a static to upward trend (from a current static to downward trend).
- There may be a static to upward trend in vegetation associated in wetlands that are grazed after July 15th in concert with the grazing system that reduces cattle head months, reduces cattle graze periods and increases rest periods in pastures. The grazing system in Alternative 3 will reduce the ability of cattle to re-graze plants and progress toward better production, diversity and vigor of understory plant species.
- Soils in wetland locations that are not fenced will continue to be unsatisfactory and impaired. This soil impairment includes natural factors (soil type, changing water levels, varying precipitation including lack thereof) along with cattle grazing. The condition and trend monitoring conducted over the next 10 years will determine what effect these changes in cattle grazing management have on soil conditions. I believe the cattle grazing changes (reduced cattle head months, reduced graze periods, increased rest in pastures) are positive steps in potentially improving the trend of soil effects associated strictly with cattle grazing. Even if cattle were removed from wetlands, this soil trend would not change because the impact is associated with density and encroachment of trees and natural conditions (soil type, fluctuating water levels in wetlands, varying precipitation).

- Outside of wetlands, Alternative 3 maintains soils and vegetation rangeland conditions as it relates to cattle grazing. As noted in the FEIS (Chapter 3, “Vegetation”), two soils areas that are unsatisfactory and impaired (Table 17) are not impacted by cattle grazing and this project/decision is not proposing any actions to change this condition. For vegetation, there is a static to downward trend in meadows and grasslands to which cattle contribute but this trend is mostly affected by increasing density and encroachment of trees into these areas. Even if cattle were removed from wetlands, the vegetative trend would not improve because the trend is tied to tree density and encroachment. This analysis/decision is not proposing any actions to reduce tree density and encroachment. Table 9 does note separate activities (outside of this decision) going on related to restoring grasslands and meadows (vegetation treatments).
- Ponderosa pine areas will be maintained as static to upward. Pinyon and juniper grassland areas above the rim will be maintained as static. Lake and deep soil site conditions above the rim, which vary site to site, will be maintained from static to upward. Pinyon and juniper grassland below the rim will be maintained as static to downward. Table 9 notes separate activities (outside of this decision) going on related to pinyon and juniper grassland below the rim addressing this downward trend as a result of the Mormon and Jacket Fires. Over the next year, that trend will change to static to upward.

Maintaining and protecting seasonal and semipermanent wetlands with emergent vegetation:

- No cattle grazing will occur at all between May 1 and May 31st. Seasonal and semipermanent wetlands are only located on the Pickett Lake Allotment.
- Exclosure fences will be built to protect the hardstem bulrush and surrounding upland buffer at Post and Perry Lakes, with a lane to access the stock tank water at Perry Lake. Exclosure fences would also be built around the emergent vegetation and surrounding upland buffer at Ducknest and Indian Tank Lakes, with a lane to access the stock tank water and the permittee’s current water claim at Indian Tank Lake.
- Fencing these four wetlands provides yearlong protection to these wetlands from cattle grazing. This results in protecting 473 acres (4 wetlands in addition to the already fenced Long Lake). In combination with the adaptive management option which could fence an additional 4 wetlands and the existing fence associated with Long Lake, there would be 605 acres out of 846 acres protected yearlong from cattle grazing in seasonal and semipermanent wetlands. The only areas affected by cattle grazing on these nine wetlands would be the four lanes to stock tanks accessing the permittee’s water right and/or filed water claims. These 4 lanes affect 2 acres of emergent vegetation (one-third of 1 percent of 605 acres) and 17 acres of upland buffer (1.3 percent of 1,339 acres).
- Fencing protects almost all of the emergent vegetation in the semipermanent wetlands on the Pickett Lake Allotment (Post and Perry Lakes). Exclosure fencing protects 50 acres out of 52.5 acres (except for 2 acres at Deep Lake; one-half acre of lane accessing stock tank water in Perry Lake) from cattle grazing. None of hardstem bulrush will be grazed by cattle.
- Grazing rotations in pastures will be adjusted so that cattle do not graze on the seasonal and semipermanent wetlands that are not fenced or proposed for fencing (adaptive management option) containing emergent vegetation from June 1 to July 15th consistent with the Forest Plan (Management Area 12 direction) (FEIS, Chapter 3, Tables 11 and

13). The wetlands applicable to this grazing rotation include: Al's Lake, Antelope North, Antelope Tank, Deep Lake (2 acres on Pickett Lake Allotment), Pickett Lake, Potato Lake, and Grass Lake (for a total of 241 acres of emergent vegetation).

- In addition, Alternative 3 (FEIS, Chapter 2, Table 6) shows grazing system changes will reduce from current management (Alternative 1) the season of use, months of cattle use, cattle head months, pasture graze period, and number of pastures rested yearly. Changing the grazing rotation along with the grazing system changes could result in reduced effects from cattle grazing on these wetlands though this will be determined through monitoring these allotments since we have never managed these allotments in this manner.
- The fencing and protection of wetlands and associated upland buffer is a change from past and recent/current cattle grazing management. It has only been within the last 2 years that cattle grazing has not been allowed until after July 15th in seasonal and semipermanent wetlands except at Long Lake (which has been fenced). This decision will go further in protecting wetlands through fencing and a change in the grazing system. In total, fencing will protect up to 605 out of 846-848 acres of seasonal and semipermanent wetlands (71 percent) which is an increase of protection over current management (43 percent; 367 out of 846-848 acres).
- Alternative 3 is consistent with Management Area 12 direction which states "Wetlands and open water containing emergent vegetation which provide nesting habitat are protected from disturbing uses that will harass nesting birds, such as activities that are noisy or would damage nests or nesting habitat from May 1 to July 15th."

In coordination with the permittee, maintain access to the permittee's water right and their filed water claims:

- The permittee has a water right for livestock use at Perry Lake and 23 filed water claims for livestock use throughout the two allotments [PRD 23]. We worked with the permittee to identify their water access needs at Perry Lake and water claims associated with seasonal and semipermanent wetlands.
- Alternative 3 maintains access to their water right and filed water claims in specific seasonal and semipermanent wetlands (those proposed for fencing) related to cattle grazing by using lanes to access stock tank water. The lanes associated with Perry Lake and Indian Tank Lake affect 1 out of 107 acres of emergent wetland vegetation. The 2 lanes associated with the adaptive management option (Boot and Indian Lakes) affect 1 out of 133 acres of emergent wetland vegetation. I feel it is acceptable to impact 2 acres of emergent vegetation in seasonal/semipermanent wetlands out of 240 acres in order to maintain the permittee's water right and filed water claims at these 4 to 8 wetlands.
- There are other seasonal wetlands that are not proposed for fencing that will be grazed after July 15th which does not change the permittee's access to filed water claims for livestock use. There are other stock tanks outside of wetlands that are accessible to the permittee and result in no change to their access of filed water claims.
- I considered two other alternatives but eliminated both from detailed study. Both included yearlong protection of wetlands (one also protected closed basins) through fencing wetlands individually and/or in a complex (groups). This fencing would have affected the permittee's access to their water right and filed water claims. To address the permittee's

livestock water use needs, both these alternatives would have required construction of water systems consisting of wells, drinkers, storage tanks, and pipelines to provide livestock water. I feel the cost and complexity of this water system for either alternative was financially expensive and unreasonable to the permittee and Forest Service.

Provide new fencing and water improvements for better cattle grazing distribution:

- Up to 1.5 miles of fence will be constructed, in sections, along the Anderson Mesa rim to keep cattle from moving down past the rim, and for a small holding pasture in the western corner of the Elliot Driveway pasture. Four miles of pipeline (connected to wells on private land) and five drinkers would be constructed to improve water distribution below the Anderson Mesa rim on the Padre Canyon Allotment.

Ability to trigger and implement two adaptive management options during the permit term, if needed:

Through this analysis, we determined that there could be two conditions triggered during implementation that we will address and incorporate as adaptive management options. These options were integrated and analyzed as part of Alternative 3. They have been coordinated with the permittee and provide flexibility to address changing conditions specific to two situations:

- **If emergent and woody vegetation utilization exceeds 20 percent at Billy Back and Boot Springs, they will be fenced from cattle.** This is an adaptive option because we are altering how cattle have grazed this area in the past. Cattle will now pass through this area in a shorter period of time rather than grazing for approximately 1 week (current management, Alternative 1). Because the permittee is moving cattle through this area and their time is limited in grazing, fencing is not anticipated to be needed at these springs. The adaptive approach will be that if cattle passing through this area utilize 20 percent or more of the emergent or woody vegetation at the springs, then the springs will be fenced by the permittee.
- **If upland vegetation trend analysis (monitoring) indicates a downward trend and/or the permittee requests grazing pasture rotation flexibility, then four seasonal wetlands will be fenced (Breezy, West Breezy, Indian, and Boot Lakes).** Fencing these wetlands and excluding them from grazing (except for two lanes) would open up two more pastures (Breezy and Boot) for grazing between June 1 and July 15 and we would still be resting 1 to 2 pastures per year in Pickett Lake Allotment. From a vegetation perspective, this adaptive management strategy provides the opportunity to consider and adapt upland vegetation species with grazing if there is a downward trend identified during monitoring (determined by cattle grazing use and utilization at four pastures: Railroad, Ducknest, Morgan and Woodland). This monitoring would occur annually as part of our yearly inspections and, if two consecutive years show downward trend, then fencing will be implemented.

Other Factors in My Decision

As part of selecting Alternative 3, I am incorporating the following key components in the FEIS as part of my decision (Chapter 2, “Design Features,” “Mitigation Measures,” and “Monitoring”). These include:

- Design Features
- Mitigation Measures
- Monitoring

Design Features

Annual Operating Instructions: Annual operating instructions (AOI) make adjustments to cattle numbers and time and duration of pasture use based on current climatic and range conditions. The AOIs are established at the beginning of each grazing season (spring) and published on the Coconino National Forest Web site: www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/publications. Annual operating instructions may be adjusted throughout the grazing season as conditions change.

The AOIs are the means by which adjustments in cattle numbers, changes in the season of use, and pasture rest periods are made in response to monitoring information such as frequency, canopy cover, Parker Three-Step plots and allotment inspections. Cattle numbers may go up or down annually but would not exceed the maximum number set by Alternative 3 (913 cattle between June 1 and September 30). The annual minimum cattle number is zero.

The AOI for the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments may be changed to reflect new information based on studies, ongoing field experiences, and conclusions. If changes are suggested that fall outside the parameters of this decision, they would be subject to NEPA analysis.

Grazing Schedules: The grazing schedule in Alternative 3 is given as a guide for future use; however, they may be adjusted as a result of monitoring, weather, or other conditions throughout the planned 10-year period. These grazing schedules will fall within the grazing parameters of Alternative 3 (FEIS, Chapter 2, Table 6). No cattle grazing would be authorized from October 1st to May 31st.

Cattle Guards: There is the need to keep cattle contained to pastures and prevent forest visitors from leaving pasture gates open. Where forest system roads are open for public use, cattle guards would be maintained. Where forest system roads are identified for closure, in past and future road decisions, no cattle guards are necessary. If gates are left open more often, new cattle guards may need to be installed.

Cattle guard maintenance is shared between the Forest Service and the permittee for level 3 roads (main surfaced roads). Cattle guard maintenance on level 2 roads (smaller, secondary roads) is the responsibility of the permittee.

Structural Improvements: Cultural, wildlife and recreation coordination will occur when implementing construction of structural improvements (i.e. fencing, pipelines, drinkers).

Utilization: The definition of utilization and seasonal utilization comes from standard protocols established by the Society of Rangeland Management and the new guidelines established by the

Region 3 Regional Forester [PRD 92]. The definitions and procedures for utilization are further described under Chapter 4, "Monitoring" (Rangeland Utilization).

Mormon and Jacket Fire Recovery: The 2003 Mormon and 2004 Jacket Fires burned on the Padre Canyon Allotment and need to recover before cattle are allowed to graze. A full carrying capacity rating averaging 100 pounds of forage per acre for cattle would be required across the burned areas on the allotment. This is likely to occur by fall of 2006, which would be the earliest cattle would be allowed to graze these burned areas. This is more than two full growing seasons in which plants would grow to maturity, produce seed heads, and become re-established.

Water Rights: There is one water right for livestock use held by the permittee on the Pickett Lake Allotment for Perry Lake and 23 filed water claims for livestock use throughout the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments [PRD 23]. Filed water claims are part of the Lower Colorado River adjudication process and a decision on their status has not been made by the State of Arizona at this time. As part of working with the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon permittee, access to water rights and/or claims will be maintained. For proposed enclosure fences around seasonal or semipermanent wetlands, access to the water rights and/or claims will be provided via lanes. The permittee has not requested lanes with the wetland enclosure designs in Alternatives 3 and 4 at Post, Ducknest, Breezy or West Breezy Lakes.

Fencing: All new fencing will have a smooth bottom wire at an 18-inch height for wildlife passage. Where possible, fences would be located within tree lines to limit impacts to visual quality. Elk jumps and goat bars (PVC pipes placed on the bottom two strands as a crossing point) may be constructed along new fences, along existing fences on game trails, and on known migration corridors as volunteers and funding are available. As fence inventories are completed, those fences that are complete barriers to wildlife will be modified to meet the fencing standards identified in the Forest Plan.

Stock Tanks: There are no new stock tanks proposed in Alternative 3. There is also no removal of existing stock tanks proposed in Alternative 3.

Stock tanks located in seasonal and semipermanent wetlands will not be maintained for the next 10 years. This decision does not include any maintenance of the two stock tanks located in the two temporary wetlands.

Stock tanks located outside of wetlands will be maintained as needed and meet the following standards: maintenance would be limited to the original boundary of the stock tank; maintenance would be limited to removal of sediment that has accumulated in the stock tank and maintenance of the tank berm and spillway; equipment that would be used includes but is not limited to a dozer, backhoe, or front end loader; maintenance frequency would range from no maintenance to whenever needed, depending on the amount of sediment flowing into the stock tank; maintenance would be done when the stock tanks are either dry or the water level is low enough so that the equipment would not get stuck in the mud; and any requirements or timing restrictions related to water quality, wildlife, archeology, or Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be followed.

Mitigation Measures

The Forest Service will apply the following mitigation measures in order to minimize and reduce potential impacts from Alternative 3:

Watershed Protection: We incorporated best management practices (BMPs) that constitute compliance with Arizona State and Federal Water Quality Standards. These measures are

designed to protect resource values, uses, and maintenance of soil productivity, stability and water quality.

- Monitor ground conditions before and during construction activities to avoid wet ground conditions that can affect soil condition and water quality.

The following grazing practices were also selected for the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments to help protect soil and water quality:

- Grazing systems are alternately rested and grazed in a planned sequence. Cattle rotate in a planned grazing system that alternates rest and graze periods throughout a given year and from year to year.
- Grazing at a level that will maintain enough cover to protect the soils and maintain or improve the quantity and quality of desired vegetation.
- Provide watering facilities for animals at selected locations. The new pipeline and drinker construction is intended to increase distribution of wildlife and livestock.
- Fencing to improve cattle management, control access, prevent soil loss, and maintain water quality.

Noxious Weeds: State listed noxious weeds located in these allotments will be treated as necessary. The permittee and Forest Service will coordinate the weed inventory and treatment with responsibilities identified through the AOI. Noxious weed monitoring is carried out at the same time allotment inspections are conducted. As noxious weed populations are found they are mapped, monitored and, in some areas, manually removed. Other treatment methods will follow guidelines established in the “Record of Decision for Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds” (USDA 2005).

Threatened and Endangered Species: Mitigation measures or implementation parameters described in the biological assessment and biological evaluation [PRD 17] are required to minimize the impacts on bald eagles and Mexican spotted owl species and habitat.

Bald Eagle

Livestock management activities such as salting, herding, and construction actions associated with grazing operations within the project area will not occur within one-quarter mile of a bald eagle roost or nest site during any time of occupation by bald eagles.

Mexican Spotted Owl

Seven acres of one Mexican spotted owl protected activity center (PAC) occurs on the Pickett Lake Allotment.

- No human disturbance or construction activities associated with livestock grazing operations would occur within this PAC during the breeding season (March 1 through August 31).
- Continue to monitor grazing use by cattle and wildlife in the ponderosa pine gamble oak type. The utilization guideline for cattle and/or wildlife is 35 percent in this key area within the 7 acres of this PAC. Monitoring will be completed to ensure utilization is below this level. Cattle will move from the Railroad pasture to another pasture when seasonal utilization approaches a “moderate” level, approximately 21-

50 percent. Past utilization monitoring in the pasture has shown that a moderate level of grazing in the pasture ensures a low level of grazing in the PAC (35 percent).

- The following guidelines will be used for placing salt, mineral blocks, or supplements:
 - Do not place these items in riparian areas, mountain meadows, or non-riparian drainages in ponderosa pine.
 - Do not place these items in spotted owl PACs.
 - Rotate salt and mineral supplement sites regularly, at least every 2 weeks, within spotted owl restricted habitat.
- Follow best management practices associated with watershed protection.
- Follow utilization guidelines to provide for favorable growth of forage species.
- If utilization guidelines are exceeded, stocking and management may need to be adjusted to maintain productivity of the pasture for the future.
- Livestock distribution techniques, such as salting and herding should be used, to provide for better use of a pasture.

Sensitive Plant Species: Sensitive plant surveys will be completed before the implementation of range improvement projects. If sensitive plant species are located, coordination with a wildlife biologist or botanist will occur to mitigate impacts which would consist of flagging specific plants and adjusting location of the improvement to avoid the plants.

Cultural Resources: Archeological sites located adjacent to proposed structural improvement areas have been marked and will be avoided by all project activities. The range staff (or other staff trained to monitor archeological resources) will periodically monitor the sites especially during construction to ensure that they have been avoided. Such inspections are to be reported in writing to the forest archeologist, indicating the date of inspection, site number of the site(s) inspected, and condition of the site(s).

Monitoring

Monitoring includes the following activities: permit compliance, allotment inspections, range readiness, forage production, rangeland utilization, condition and trend, precipitation, soil and riparian condition, adaptive management option (fencing four wetlands and two springs), noxious weeds, and threatened and endangered species.

Permit Compliance: Throughout each grazing season Forest Service personnel will monitor to determine accomplishments of the permit terms and conditions, the AMP, and the AOI.

Allotment Inspections: Allotment inspections are a written summary done each fall by Forest Service personnel to document compliance monitoring and to provide an overall history of that year's grazing. This document may include weather history, the year's success, problems, improvement suggestions for the future, and a monitoring summary.

Range Readiness: Each spring, Forest Service personnel and/or the grazing permittee will assess range readiness prior to cattle coming on the allotment to determine if vegetative conditions are ready for cattle grazing. The range is generally ready for grazing when cool season grasses are leafed out, forbs are in bloom, and brush and aspen are leafed out. These characteristics indicate

the growing season has progressed far enough to replenish root reserves so that grazing will not seriously impact these forage plants.

Forage Production: Production surveys for these allotments will be done every 9 to 13 years. Methods used for these surveys will use the best available methods at that time. These values will be used as tools to manage this allotment, but will not be the sole measurement to establish carrying capacity. The most recent forage production surveys were done as part of this analysis in 2001. The next survey is scheduled to occur after 2010.

Rangeland Utilization: Long-term condition and trend monitoring is the primary standard for monitoring of this cattle grazing management system. Utilization is used as a tool to understand and achieve the goals of long-term management. Utilization guidelines are intended to indicate a level of use or desired stocking rates to be achieved over a period of years.

The definition of utilization and seasonal utilization come from standard protocols established by the Society of Rangeland Management and the new guidelines established by Region 3 Regional Forester [PRD 92]. The following definitions and procedures for utilization were taken and adapted to fit this project.

Utilization is the proportion or degree of current year's forage production that is consumed or destroyed by animals (including insects). It is a comparison of the amount of herbage left compared with the amount of herbage produced during the year. Utilization is measured at the end of the growing season when the total annual production can be accounted for and the effects of grazing in the whole management unit can be assessed. Utilization guidelines are intended to indicate a level of use or designated stocking rate to be achieved over a period of years.

Utilization measurements will be taken in key areas which reflect grazing effects within an entire pasture. One key area will be established within each large pasture, at existing long-term monitoring sites if possible, to represent overall pasture utilization. Utilization measurements can indicate the need for management changes prior to this need being identified through long-term monitoring. Utilization data will not be used alone, but would be used along with climate and condition and trend data, to set stocking levels and pasture rotations for future years.

Cattle will move from one pasture to another when seasonal utilization in a pasture approaches a "moderate" level. Moderate seasonal utilization is an approximate value because it takes into account any additional growth which might occur later that year and considers season of use, wildlife use, weather conditions, availability of forage, and water in pastures. This moderate seasonal utilization level leaves residual cover for wildlife and soils and provides for long-term health of the grazed plants.

If monitoring shows utilization rates exceed the utilization guideline in a pasture in a given year, the grazing schedule and/or cattle numbers will be adjusted the following year so the utilization guidelines are not exceeded again. If utilization is exceeded after these adjustments are made, then the grazing management system would be changed to ensure this does not happen in the future.

Condition and Trend: Watershed and vegetative condition and trend monitoring will help determine the effectiveness of the allotment management plan and long-term range and watershed trends.

Parker Three-Step and paced transect monitoring points were established throughout this allotment in the 1950-60s. These transects are one of the best historic records of range condition and trend. The photo points and vegetative ground cover data show how the site has changed over

time. Canopy cover and frequency plots were placed with the Parker Three-Step transects in 2001 to add to this historic data.

Ocular plant canopy cover 0.10-acre plots were used to compare existing conditions with potential and desired vegetative community conditions. Over time, these plots will show how canopy cover changes. Canopy cover will provide an indication of how plants are growing, assuming that if they are getting bigger and occupying more space, then they are doing well and can be a relative gauge of vigor.

Frequency and ground cover data were collected using the widely accepted plant frequency method (University of Arizona, Extension Report 9043, 1997). These plots will monitor trends in plant species abundance, plant species distribution, and ground cover. This will provide information on plant composition and additional information on regeneration.

These transects will be read at least every 10 years by Forest Service personnel. These plots will help determine the effectiveness of current management.

Precipitation: Precipitation is currently recorded at the Flagstaff National Weather Service office at Bellemont. Precipitation data may be recorded within or near the allotments for more localized information. Precipitation data may be recorded throughout the year and summarized in the annual inspection. This data assists managers with forage utilization and production data collection.

Soil and Riparian Condition: The Intergovernmental Agreement between the Forest Service and the State of Arizona that controls water quality and the Clean Water Act requires implementation and effectiveness monitoring. The objectives of monitoring are to: (1) collect data sufficient to evaluate effects of management activities on soil and water resources; and (2) support changes in management activities to protect soil and water quality. Monitoring will help determine how successfully managers are implementing guidance practices and how effectively those practices are protecting soil and water quality. The current and proposed cattle grazing system incorporates best management practices (BMPs) and grazing practices (GPs) and constitutes compliance with Arizona State and Federal Water Quality Standards. Arizona Department of Water Quality (ADEQ) will continue to monitor water quality in the area.

Evaluating watershed condition can be assessed using information from the monitoring schemes above. Monitoring of plant abundance, ground cover, species diversity and estimates of overall soil condition (using the methods described throughout this monitoring section) will indicate whether or not management practices are effectively meeting management goals. Trends toward improvements in species abundance and diversity should indicate that management practices are effectively improving soil condition and by inference, maintaining or improving downstream water quality and complying with water quality standards. Conversely, decreases in plant abundance and species diversity may indicate that management practices are not effective and need to be changed. Environmental factors, especially precipitation, will be considered when evaluating monitoring results.

Condition and trend monitoring was established at the following wetlands using photo point and plant inventories in the fall of 2003: Indian Lake, Long Lake, Al's Lake, Antelope Tank, Pickett Lake, Boot Lake, Ducknest Lake, Grass Lake, Indian Tank Lake, Long Lake, Perry Lake, Deep Lake, West Breezy Lake, and Breezy Lake. Additional monitoring of these plots may occur in the next 10 years if funding is available.

Canopy cover, frequency and composition plots were established at Perry Lake, Boot Lake, Ducknest Lake, Breezy Lake, West Breezy Lake, Indian Lake, Post Lake, Long Lake, and Deep Lake. Additional monitoring of these plots may occur in the next 10 years if funding is available.

Residual cover monitoring will occur at Antelope Tank Lake, Pickett Lake, Indian Tank Lake, Ducknest Lake to determine the height and density of wetland vegetation: (1) from cattle grazing after July 15th; (2) within two wetland exclosures; and (3) combination of cattle grazing after July 15th with yearlong rest. This monitoring will be established after the exclosures are built at Indian Tank and Ducknest lakes. Monitoring will occur during the waterfowl nesting season as funding is available.

Adaptive Management Option for Fencing of Boot, Breezy, West Breezy and Indian Lakes: Added pressure may be put on Railroad and Ducknest pastures after Indian Tank, Ducknest, and Perry Lakes are fenced because no grazing is allowed from June 1 through July 15 in seasonal or semipermanent wetlands. The Padre Canyon Allotment, Railroad, Ducknest, Morgan, and Woodland pastures would be monitored for condition and trend to determine if these pastures are being used too much at the same time of year, year after year. The clusters, canopy cover, frequency and ground cover plots in these pastures will help determine trends in these areas. These plots will be reread as necessary.

If monitoring indicates a downward trend in native plant community abundance and diversity in these pastures, or if the permittee requests increased flexibility in pasture rotations, the emergent vegetation and surrounding upland buffer would be fenced at Boot, Breezy, West Breezy and Indian Lakes. These additional wetland fences would allow Boot and Breezy pastures to be grazed from June 1 through July 15 with no disturbance to wetland nesting birds, except for lanes at Indian Tank and Boot Lakes.

Noxious Weeds: State listed noxious weeds located in these allotments will be treated as necessary. The permittee and Forest Service will coordinate the weed inventory and treatment with responsibilities identified through the AOI. Noxious weed monitoring is carried out at the same time allotment inspections are conducted. As noxious weed populations are found they are mapped, monitored and in some areas, manually removed. Other treatment methods will follow guidelines established in the "Final Environmental Impact Statement for Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds" (USDA 2005b).

Threatened and Endangered Species: Threatened and endangered species are monitored in compliance and consultation with the USFWS. Vegetation monitoring points (key areas) have been established on the allotment and are monitored according to consultation requirements.

These key areas will normally be one-quarter to 1 mile from water, located on productive soils on level to intermediate slopes, and be readily accessible for grazing. Size of the key forage monitoring areas could be 20 to 500 acres. In some situations such as high mountain meadows with perennial streams, key areas may be closer than one-quarter mile from water and less than 20 acres. Within key forage monitoring areas, select appropriate key species to monitor average allowable use (USDA 1987a, p. 66-1).

One Mexican spotted owl (MSO) key area plot is already established on the Pickett Allotment and monitored annually:

- Management Area: Ponderosa pine/oak
- Pasture: Railroad

- Location: Southwest portion of this pasture
- Key Species: squirreltail, june grass, blue grass, carex

My decision includes my review and determination of:

- Consistency with the Coconino National Forest Plan (FEIS, Chapter 1, “Management Direction;” PRD 53);
- Consistency with the Anderson Mesa Pronghorn Plan (FEIS, Chapter 2, “Design Features”);
- Consideration and integration of the Anderson Mesa Landscape Scale Assessment as applicable to the project’s purpose and need statement (FEIS, Chapter 1, “Proposed Action;” PRD 59).

Issues

This environmental analysis was initiated on December 15, 2000 (Refer to the FEIS, Chapter 1, “Public Involvement and Issues”). Two significant issues were identified during the environmental assessment (EA) comment period. The first issue involved wetlands and how the proposed cattle grazing system and utilization levels affect seasonal and semipermanent wetland habitat for ground-nesting birds and riparian vegetative health within wetlands. The second issue was concerned with the proposed utilization level of 35 percent. From these two significant issues, we developed alternatives to address them in the EA. However, I never published a Decision Notice and associated EA because I re-initiated this analysis as an EIS. The issues of wetlands and utilization, from the original EA comments, led to the development of the Proposed Action (Alternative 3) and Alternative 4 in the DEIS/FEIS. There were no new significant issues identified during the scoping comment period associated with the Notice of Intent to prepare a draft EIS [PRD 50] nor during the official comment period for the DEIS. Our response to DEIS comments is located in the FEIS (Appendix C).

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, the Forest Service considered five other alternatives; three were analyzed in detail and two considered and eliminated from detailed study. These alternatives are summarized below. More detailed descriptions and a comparison of alternatives can be found in the FEIS (Chapter 2, Tables 4, 5, 6, and 8).

Alternative 1 - Current Management

Alternative 1 would authorize cattle grazing on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments under the current grazing management system for cattle numbers and season of use. Grazing rotations would be adjusted so cattle do not graze on seasonal and semipermanent wetlands containing emergent vegetation from June 1 to July 15.

Alternative 2 - No Action/No Grazing

Alternative 2 would not authorize cattle grazing on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments. With no cattle use, grazing periods, rest periods, utilization guidelines, or adjustments to AOIs do not apply. No new structural improvements would be built. Existing

structural range improvements would require further analysis and coordination with other agencies to determine whether or not to maintain or remove these improvements.

Alternative 4 - Reduction in Permitted Cattle Numbers and Utilization

This alternative is similar to the Proposed Action (Alternative 3), except cattle and/or wildlife utilization guidelines would be reduced from 35 percent to 20 percent and cattle head months would be reduced by 15 percent from the Proposed Action (29 percent reduction from current management). All other actions such as grazing rotation schedules, rest periods, structural improvements, enclosure fences, and adaptive management options would be the same as described under Alternative 3.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Two alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. Both involved fencing a mix of wetlands and closed basins in the Pickett Lake Allotment to protect them from cattle grazing year long. One alternative fenced all wetlands individually including an upland buffer. The other alternative fenced wetlands and closed basins as complexes and reflected a larger upland and wetland buffer. The FEIS explains the rationale for considering and eliminating these two alternatives from detailed study (Chapter 2).

Public Involvement

The Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments project, with a different proposed action, first appeared in the Coconino National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) on December 15, 2000 and has been published in all subsequent SOPAs. As the proposed action evolved and the level of environmental analysis changed over the past 5 years, we have consistently provided opportunities for the permittee, adjacent landowners, and interested organizations and agencies to comment.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for this project was published in the "Federal Register" on November 3, 2004 and mailed to 42 interested citizens or organizations. The NOI indicated that the Forest Service was initially considering four alternatives: current management (Alternative 1), no action/no grazing (Alternative 2), proposed action (Alternative 3), and reduction in utilization (Alternative 4). The NOI asked for public comment on the proposal until December 3, 2004. Seven letters were received in response and no new significant issues were identified during this public scoping period.

A DEIS was prepared and a Notice of Availability to comment published in the "Federal Register" on May 6, 2005. The official comment period ended on June 20, 2005. Ten comment letters were received in response to the DEIS [PRD 50], which included the suggestion of a new alternative. I considered this alternative and eliminated it from further study. My rationale for dismissing this alternative from detailed study is documented in the FEIS (Chapter 2).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This project is consistent with the following:

- Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands (Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976).

- Forest Service policy on rangeland management (FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1, FSH 2209.13).
- Federal regulation (36 CFR 222.2 (c)) which states that National Forest System lands would be allocated for livestock grazing and allotment management plans (AMP) would be prepared consistent with land management plans.
- Authorization of livestock grazing permits for a 10-year period is required by law (FLPMA Sec. 402 (a)&(b) (3) and 36 CFR 222.3), unless there is pending disposal, or it would be devoted to other uses prior to the end of 10 years, or it would be in the best interest of sound land management to specify a shorter term.

The planning and decisionmaking process for this project was conducted in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, policies and plans. Shown below is a partial list of Federal laws and executive orders pertaining to project-specific planning and environmental analysis on Federal lands. This project is consistent with the following:

Clean Air Act of 1955: Cattle grazing will not cause disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effects to air quality [PRD 58].

Clean Water Act of 1948, as amended: This project complies with Arizona State laws regarding natural resource protection, including but not limited to water quality [PRD 58].

Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960: This project is consistent with applicable Coconino Forest Plan standards and guidelines [PRD 53].

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended: An archeological survey and cultural resources clearance report has been completed for this project [PRD 20] and concludes under the Programmatic Agreement for Compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA that the project will have no effect on cultural properties and values. Native American tribes and communities were contacted for comments. These allotments are permitted to the Hopi Tribe, who submitted comments.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended: The effects of the Proposed Action and alternatives have been analyzed and are disclosed in a document available for public review and input.

Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended: The analysis and disclosure of effects to endangered, threatened, and proposed species is complete. Consultation with USFWS for effects to threatened and endangered species within the project area was completed [PRD 17]. The USFWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination that the project will have no effect on bald eagle and may affect but will not likely adversely affect the Mexican spotted owl [PRD 17].

Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974, as amended: This project is consistent with applicable Coconino Forest Plan standards and guidelines [PRD 53].

National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976, as amended: This project complies with the Coconino National Forest Plan and associated amendments [PRD 53]. This project incorporates all applicable Forest Plan forest-wide standards and guidelines and management area direction as they apply to the project area. This project is also in

compliance with Forest Plan goals and objectives. All required interagency review and coordination has been accomplished.

American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1979: This project would not deny American Indians access to land within the project area for traditional and cultural purposes.

Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1980: The effects on archeological sites have been analyzed and disclosed in the cultural resources report [PRD 20].

Executive Order 11593 (cultural resources): An archeological survey and cultural resources clearance report has been completed for this project [PRD 20].

Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice): Implementation of this project is not anticipated to cause disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations (see Environmental Justice analysis in Chapter 3 of the EIS).

Executive Order 11990 (wetland protection): The project area was inventoried for wetlands classified as “seasonal” or higher (i.e. seasonal and semipermanent) in 2002 and 2003 [PRD 10]. These wetlands will be managed consistent with MA 12 in the Forest Plan. This decision will protect up to 71 percent of seasonal and semipermanent wetland (emergent vegetation) and upland buffer acres within the project area through construction of grazing exclosures. There is no proposed construction within wetlands (besides minimum disturbance from fence/lane construction in the upland buffer), or disposition of wetlands to other ownership, nor easement through wetlands [PRD 58].

Executive Order 13186 (migratory birds): This project is consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as well as agency guidelines for conformance with the act [PRD 58]. Implementing standards and guidelines tied to MA 12 will provide opportunities to restore and enhance habitat for migratory bird species of concerns in seasonal and semipermanent wetland areas also tied to precipitation.

Forest Service Sensitive Species: Effects to Forest Service sensitive species were considered and a biological assessment has been completed for the 15 sensitive species found within the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments [PRD 17]. A determination was made for each species in the FEIS (Chapter 3, “Sensitive Plant and Wildlife Species”).

Management Indicator Species (MIS): The FEIS (Chapter 3, “Management Indicator Species”) addressed management indicator species by linking Forest Plan management areas located within the two allotments with the management indicator species representative for that management area and habitat component (FEIS, Chapter 3, Tables 23 and 24). This decision will not result in a change to forest-wide habitat or population trends, as applicable to each MIS.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that best meets the goals of section 101 of the National Environmental Policy Act and is required by 40 CFR 1505.2(b) to be identified in a Record of Decision. “*Ordinarily, this is the alternative that causes the least*

damage to the biological and physical environment and best preserves and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources” (FSH 1909.15, Section 05).

Based on my review of the alternatives, I have identified Alternative 2 (No Action/No Grazing). Alternative 2 is environmentally preferable because it would not authorize cattle grazing or construct any of the associated range improvements (fencing, pipeline) on the Pickett Lake and Padre Canyon Allotments.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.7. The permittee has the right to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 251, but not both regulations. A written notice of appeal, clearly stating it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215, shall be filed within 45 days of the date of publication of legal notice of this decision in the Arizona Daily Sun, the newspaper of record. The publication date in the Arizona Daily Sun is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the DEIS comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14. An appeal must be filed by regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand delivery, or express delivery with the appeal deciding officer. Written appeals must be submitted to:

Forest Supervisor
Appeal Deciding Officer
Coconino National Forest
ATTN: Pickett/Padre FEIS Appeal
1824 S. Thompson Street
Flagstaff, AZ 86001-2529

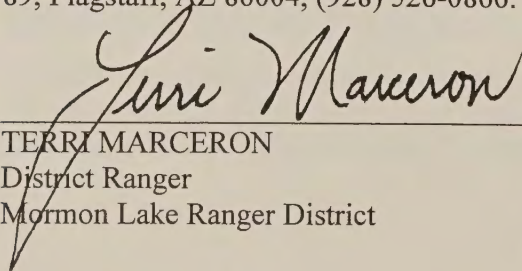
The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Adobe (.pdf), or Word (.doc) to appeals-southwestern-coconino@fs.fed.us. Appeals must have an identifiable name attached to it. Verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals. When using the electronic mailbox, you will receive an automated reply if the message is received. If you do not receive this automated reply, it is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure the appeal is received by the deadline (36 CFR 215.15).

Implementation

This project may be implemented 5 business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the Notice of Decision in the Arizona Daily Sun. If an appeal is filed, implementation may begin 15 business days following a final decision on the appeal. Implementation is defined as actually doing the ground-disturbing actions described in this notice.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Katherine Sánchez Meador or Mike Hannemann at the Peaks Ranger District, 5075 N. Highway 89, Flagstaff, AZ 86004, (928) 526-0866.


TERRI MARCERON
District Ranger
Mormon Lake Ranger District


Date