

Decision Memo

Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Grazing Allotments Management Plan

USDA Forest Service
Peaks Ranger District, Coconino National Forest
Coconino County, Arizona

Background

The Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments are on the Peaks Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest (see Maps 1 and 2). Grasslands and ponderosa pine dominate the vegetation on the Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments at an elevation ranging from 6,700 to 7,300 feet. This vegetation varies from open grasslands to dense ponderosa pine trees. The allotments lie on the lower slope of the San Francisco Peaks. No major canyons or riparian areas exist on the allotments.

The Wild Bill Allotment consists of approximately 26,327 acres, divided into four pastures: Kendrick Park, Hochderffer, South Wild Bill, and North Wild Bill (see Map 2). Current permitted use for the allotment allows up to 502 head of cattle (cow/calf) from May 15 through September 30 (2,294 HM or 3,028 AUM). The Wild Bill Allotment boundary starts approximately nine miles northeast of Flagstaff; the allotment is bisected by Highway 180. This allotment is located within all or portions of: T24N R6E Sections 32 and 33; T23N R6E Sections 4-9, 19-21, 27-34; T22N, R6E Sections 4-6; T22N R5E Sections 1-4, 9-16, and 18; T23N R5E Sections 12-14, 23-26, and 34-36.

The Slate Mountain Allotment consists of approximately 46,115 acres, divided into four pastures: Maverick, Cedar, Cedar Holding, and Slate (see Map 1). Current permitted use for the allotment allows up to 600 head of cattle (cow/calf) from May 15 through September 30 (2,742 HM or 3,619 AUM). The Slate Mountain Allotment starts from the north end of Wild Bill Allotment (approximately 19 miles north of the City of Flagstaff) and runs to the northwest boundary of the Coconino National Forest; Highway 180 also bisects this allotment. The Slate Mountain Allotment is located within all or portions of: T24N, R6E Sections 2-10, 15-22, 27-29; T24N, R5E Sections 1-3, 10-12, 13-15, 23, and 24; T25N R6E, Sections 1-4, 9-12, 13-16, 20-36; and T25N R5E Sections 5-8, 17-23, 26-35.

Decision

I have decided to re-authorize grazing for up to 600 head of cattle (cow/calf) from May 15 through September 30 (2,742 HM or 3,619 AUM) on the Slate Mountain Allotment and 502 head of cattle (cow/calf) from May 15 through September 30 (2,294 HM or 3,028 AUM) on the Wild Bill Allotment. The authorizations will be through a term grazing permit and includes the following design features:

Utilization: The current utilization¹ guideline will continue to allow up to 35 percent use by cattle and/or wildlife during the cattle grazing season of May through September. This includes a “moderate” seasonal utilization guideline which is measured before the end of the growing season and is used when determining cattle need to move. Cattle will move from one pasture to another when seasonal utilization approaches a “moderate” level, approximately 21-50 percent. Pastures will not be grazed again during the grazing season. Once this use standard is met across the allotments, cattle will be moved off the allotments.

Adaptive Management: An adaptive management flowchart and explanation was developed for these allotments and can be found in the range specialist report (PRD 15). The reauthorization includes the continued use of adaptive management, which provides more flexibility for managing cattle. The objective of adaptive management for these allotments is to maintain or improve perennial grasses and ground cover trends. When possible, annual and long term monitoring will be conducted and evaluated with the permittees and/or forest personnel. The new modified grazing management would be followed until either an upward or downward change in trend occurs.

If adaptive management adjustments are needed, the range specialist will develop these modifications in collaboration with the permittee(s), and others as appropriate. Livestock management would be modified to improve the downward trend through a possible reduction of numbers, shorter graze periods, increasing pasture rest periods, or eliminating livestock grazing entirely. Such changes will not exceed the limits for timing, intensity, duration, and frequency defined in this Decision Memo. The modifications would be implemented through the Annual Operating Instructions. An example of a situation that could call for adaptive management adjustments is drought conditions.

Monitoring: The type and frequency for monitoring the State Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments will occur as funding is available and will include:

- permittee compliance, allotment inspections, range readiness, forage production, rangeland utilization (annually)
- condition and trend (every five to ten years)
- frequency and canopy cover plots and a soil condition rating will be continued at long-term monitoring sites throughout the allotments (every five to ten years)

Decision Rationale

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under Section 339 of the FY 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447). The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because this action meets the provisions outlined in the Appropriations Act as follows:

1) The decision continues current grazing management.

¹ 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 desired stocking rate to be achieved over a period of years.

My decision continues current livestock numbers and grazing management, as described in the “Background” section of this Decision Memo.

2) Monitoring indicates that current grazing management is meeting, or satisfactorily moving the area toward, objectives in the land and resource management plan, as determined by the Secretary.

The Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments include the following Management Areas (MA): MA 3 Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer Less Than 40 Percent Slopes; MA 4 Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer Greater Than 40 Percent Slopes; MA 5 Aspen; MA 6 Unproductive Timber Land; MA 7 Pinyon-juniper Woodland Less Than 40 Percent Slopes; MA 8 Pinyon-juniper Woodland Greater Than 40 Percent Slopes; MA 9 Mountain Grasslands; MA 10 Grassland and Sparse Pinyon-juniper Above the Rim; and MA 17 Special Areas. Existing condition information described below indicates rangeland conditions on the allotments are being maintained or improved with the current cattle grazing management. Continued monitoring will help managers to evaluate the status of maintaining and improving rangeland conditions (PRD 15).

Current permitted cattle numbers, under the current grazing management system, fall within the carrying capacity of the allotments. Carrying capacity for this analysis is based on: actual use data, condition and trend monitoring, cattle and wildlife use patterns, cattle health and condition, soil surveys (USDA 1995), forage production estimates, and professional opinion (PRD 15).

The overall trend for these allotments is static to upward. Increases in ponderosa pine and juniper on some portions of the allotments are slowing any improvement in trend. Impacts from historic uses by cattle and elk in isolated areas, poorly located roads, flooding during snowmelt, and heavy thunderstorms may also slow improvements in trend. (PRD 15).

Sixteen monitoring plots were established on the Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments in 1957 and 1958. These sites have either remained static or have an upward trend since being established. From 2001 to 2006, which was during a drought period, six sites had an upward trend, two sites had a static to upward trend, and eight sites had a static trend (PRD 15).

These range condition trends exist under the current cattle grazing system and within the current utilization guideline for cattle and wildlife. Grazing has remained within this utilization guideline and cattle have been able to use the allotments for the full length of the grazing season. Cattle must be moved early if the utilization level is reached prior to planned rotations, or cattle may not enter a pasture if utilization from wildlife already meets the utilization guideline. However, wildlife grazing has not been that high on these allotments. Early moves or skipping pastures has not been routinely needed under the current grazing system and have only occurred on occasion, mainly related to drought conditions.

Of the 71,052 acres on the Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments, all have satisfactory rangeland management status and a mid to high-similarity to the desired natural community with static to upward trends. Cattle currently graze a large portion of these satisfactory acres.

Soil condition status is obtained from the Coconino National Forest Terrestrial Ecosystems Survey (TES) (USDA 1995). Based on TES predictions and field surveys, satisfactory and impaired soils exist on the Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments. Of 71,052 acres on the allotments, 67,747 acres are in satisfactory range condition (95%); 3,305 acres are impaired (5%); and 0 acres are unsatisfactory. Based upon this information, Forest Service lands on the Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotment are considered to be in satisfactory condition.

Based on this information and the project record (which includes monitoring information), I find my decision is consistent with the 1987 Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Coconino Forest Plan), as amended (PRD 9).

3) There are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment.

I considered the following resource conditions in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warranted further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3):

- Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat: The District Wildlife Biologist has determined the project “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” Mexican spotted owl and its critical habitat (Biological Assessment, PRD 22). This determination is based on criteria outlined in the Framework for Streamlining Informal Consultation for Livestock Grazing Activities (USDA 2005). The determination is appropriate, as all three of the following criteria are met:
 - Livestock grazing or livestock management activities will occur within protected activity centers (PAC), but no human disturbance or construction actions associated with the livestock grazing will occur in PACs during the breeding season.
 - Livestock grazing and livestock management activities within PACs, in the action area, will be managed for levels that provide the woody and herbaceous vegetation necessary for cover for rodent prey species, and maintain the residual biomass that will support prescribed natural and ignited fires that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Forest.
 - In owl foraging areas, forage utilization will be maintained at conservative levels (30-40 %).

PAC habitat within the two allotments is limited to approximately 800 acres of mostly steep habitat that is rarely used by livestock. Given the current utilization standards the proposed action is unlikely to result in adverse effects to Mexican spotted owls (PRD 22).

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: There are no flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds in the project area.
- Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas: There are no congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas in the project area.
- Inventoried roadless areas: There are no inventoried roadless areas in the project area.
- Research Natural Areas: The Red Mountain Geological Area is located within the Slate Mountain Allotment. No grazing capacity is assigned to this area. Cattle are not attracted to the area due to limited forage and lack of water.
- Native American areas of traditional cultural importance, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas: 13 Native American tribes were consulted and none of them have expressed concern with the project. An archeological survey and clearance report was completed with no effects to archeological resources or sites anticipated (PRD 27).

The project record, located at the Peaks Ranger District, contains further documentation supporting the findings of no extraordinary circumstances. In reviewing the project record, I have determined the analysis considered the best available science.

Public Involvement

This project has been listed in the Coconino National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since October 2006. On March 7, 2007, a detailed Proposed Action with maps was mailed to nine interested individuals/groups for a 30-day scoping period. Also in July 2007, 13 Native American tribes were consulted about this project. No comments were received in response to this public scoping or tribal consultation.

Compliance with Other Laws

In addition to meeting Coconino Forest Plan standards and guidelines, this project is also 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).
- Federal regulation (36 CFR 222.2 (c)) which states that National Forest System lands will be allocated for livestock grazing and these allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans, and the Clean Water Act of 1948, Clean Air Act of 1955, Endangered Species Act of 1973, and 13186 (Conservation of Migratory Birds), and National Historic Preservation Act 1966, as amended.
- Authorization of livestock grazing permits for a ten-year period is required by law (FLPMA Sec. 402 (a)&(b) (3) and 36 CFR 222.3), unless there is pending disposal, or it will be devoted to other uses prior to the end of ten years, or it will be in best interest of sound land management to specify a shorter term.

Implementation Date

This project can be implemented immediately following the decision date. The decision may be implemented during the permittee appeal period, unless the Reviewing Officer grants a stay under 251.91.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal under 36 CFR 215.12(f). The Slate Mountain and Wild Bill Allotments permittee may appeal the decision under 36 CFR 251. A Notice of Appeal must be consistent with 36 CFR 251.90 and filed simultaneously with Nora Rasure, Appeal Reviewing Officer, ATTN: Slate Mountain/Wild Bill Appeal, Coconino National Forest, 1824 S Thompson Street, Flagstaff, AZ 86001-2529; and Gene Waldrip, Deciding Officer, Peaks Ranger District, 5075 N US Highway 89, Flagstaff, AZ 86004 within 45 days from the date of the decision.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning my decision, please contact Mike Hannemann, Range Staff for the Peaks and Mormon Lake Districts at (928) 526-0866.

/s/ Gene Waldrip
GENE WALDRIP
District Ranger

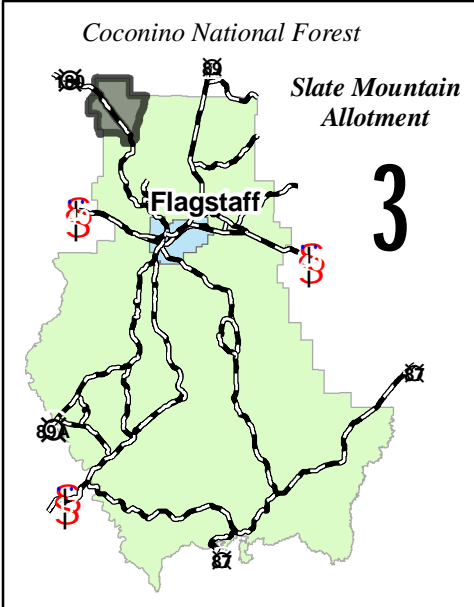
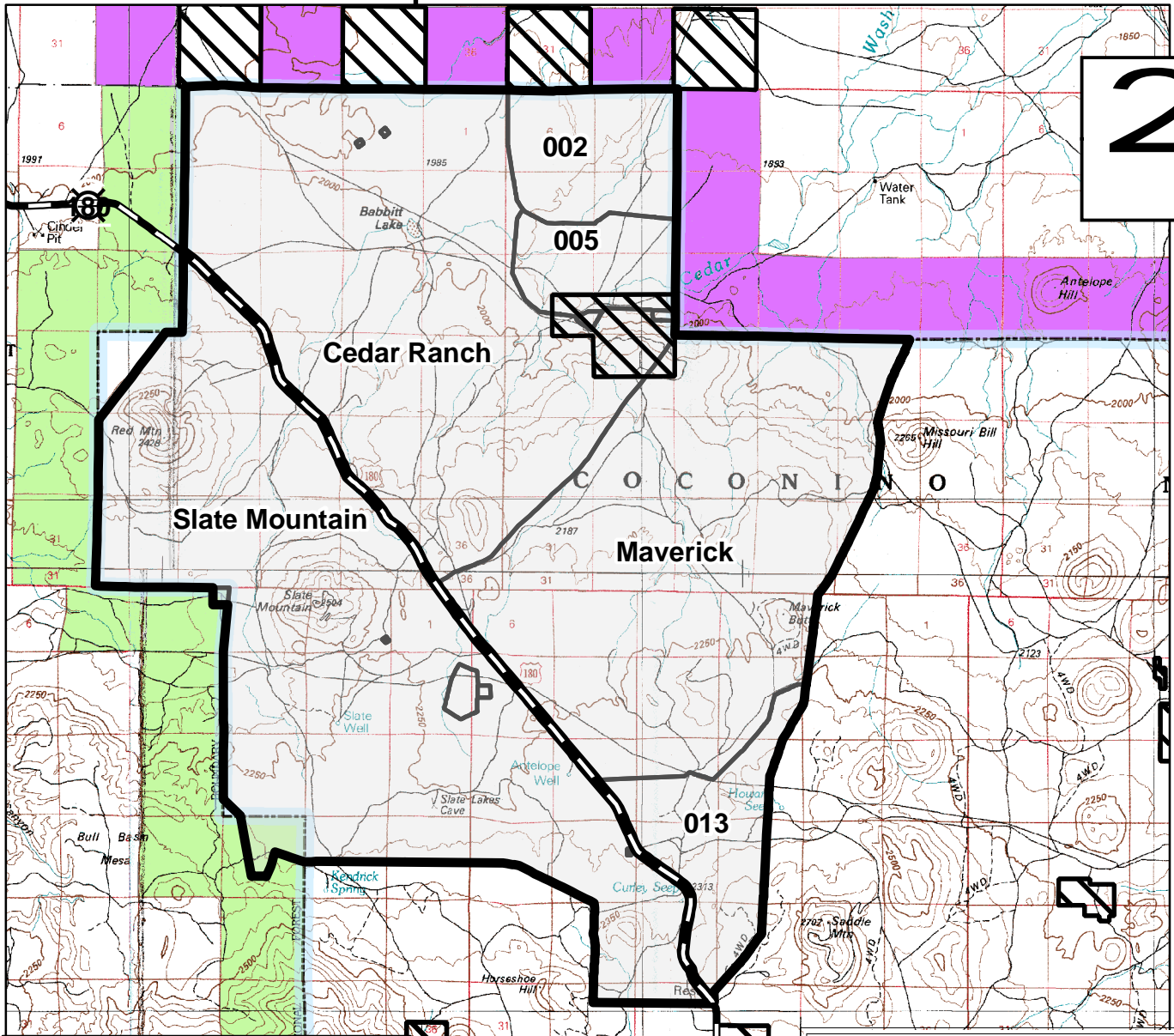
September 17, 2007
Date

Slate Mountain Range Allotment

Coconino National Forest

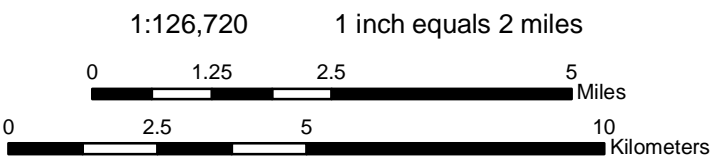
Map 1 - General Location

2



Legend

- Slate Mountain Allotment Boundary
- Highways & Interstates
- Land Ownership Status**
- Owner**
- KNF
- PRIVATE
- STATE
- Coconino N. F. Boundary

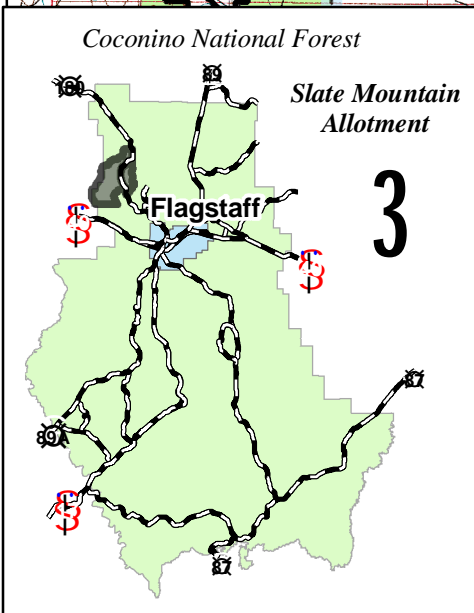
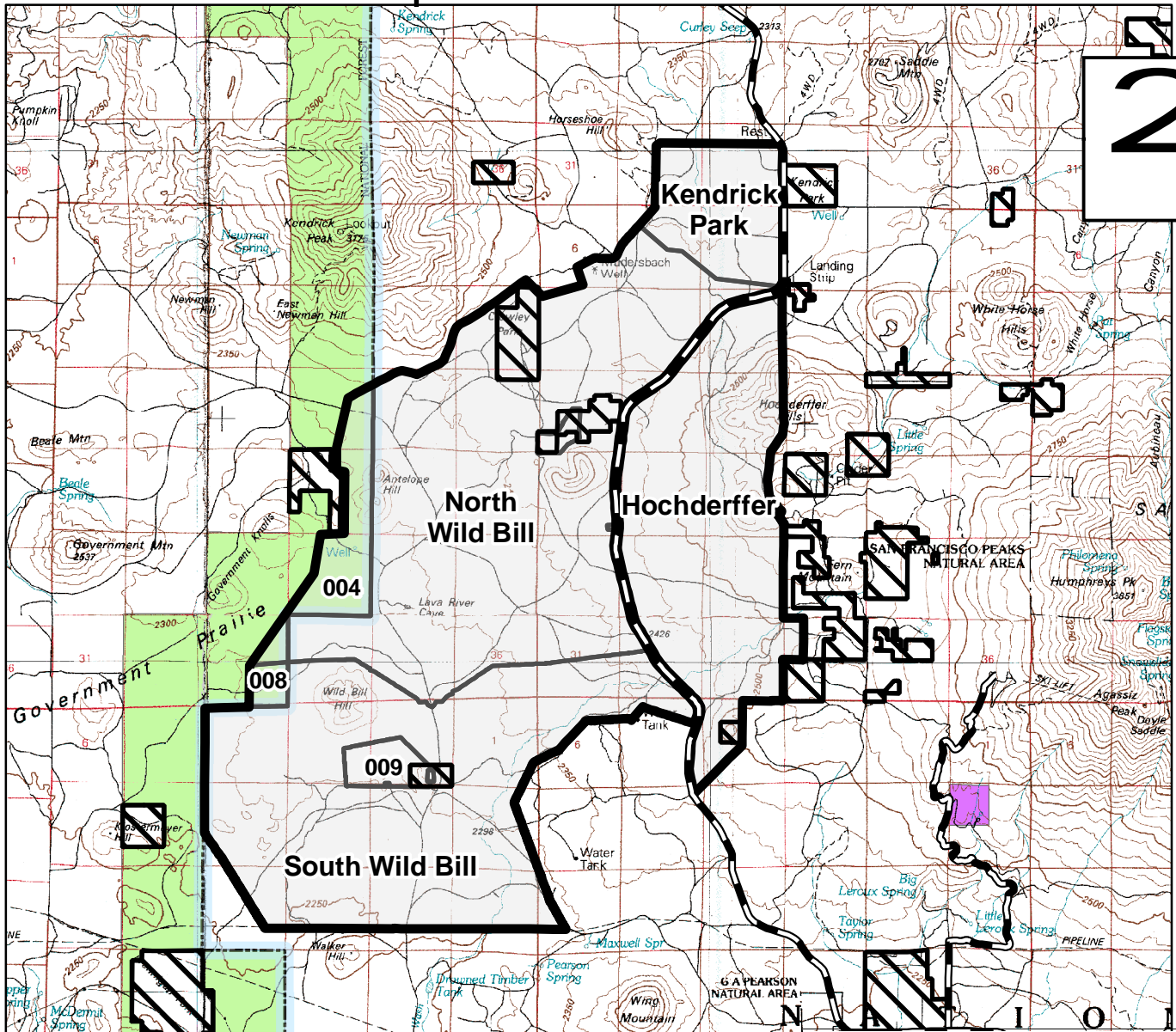


Wild Bill Range Allotment

Coconino National Forest

Map 2 - General Location

2



Legend

- Slate Mountain Allotment Boundary
- Highways & Interstates
- Land Ownership Status**
- Owner**
- KNF
- PRIVATE
- STATE
- Coconino N. F. Boundary

1:126,720

1 inch equals 2 miles

