# 1 Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing

- 2 Description
- 3 Rangelands are shrublands, woodlands, wetlands, and deserts that are grazed by domestic livestock or
- 4 wild animals. Livestock grazing can be used to manage rangelands by harvesting forage to produce
- 5 livestock, changing plant composition, or reducing fuel loads. Sustainable and productive rangelands are
- 6 one of the key ecosystem services on the Tonto NF. Rangelands contribute to a traditional western way of
- 7 life and are essential for the survival of many small ranching operations. Rangelands and the associated
- 8 range improvements (i.e., ponds, troughs, fences, corrals, windmills, etc.) provide scenery and
- 9 recreational (for example, hunting, wildlife viewing) opportunities to the public and provide habitat for
- 10 numerous species.
- 11 Congress has designated grazing as an important use of National Forest System lands through various
- 12 legislative acts (Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and
- 13 Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of
- 14 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976). Regulations include that "forage-producing National
- 15 Forest System lands will be managed for livestock grazing and the allotment management plans will be
- 16 prepared consistent with land management plans" (36 CFR 33 222.2) and "all grazing and livestock use
- 17 on National Forest System lands ... must be authorized by a grazing or livestock use permit" (36 CFR
- 18 222.3). Ranchers are issued permits to graze a specific number of livestock in designated areas. Ranchers
- 19 holding grazing permits are referred to as permittees.
- 20 Rangelands are divided into logical grazing units called allotments. Allotment boundaries often follow
- 21 topographical features such as ridgelines or creeks and may or may not be fenced entirely. Allotments are
- 22 further subdivided into pastures, and most allotments follow some kind of rotational grazing system
- 23 where livestock are moved through different pastures as the year progresses. Allotment and pasture
- 24 boundaries are changed administratively as needed.
- 25 Nearly the entire Tonto National Forest is divided into grazing allotments; however, a few allotments are
- 26 considered vacant (no current permittee) or closed (no longer authorized for permitted livestock grazing).
- 27 Status of allotments are dynamic so a list of open, vacant, and closed allotments in this plan would not be
- 28 useful. Over the last decade, the Tonto NF has worked with partners and permittees to reduce grazing
- 29 pressure on sensitive areas (e.g., critical areas, riparian area). Currently, the Tonto NF manages the
- 30 rangeland resources to balance livestock numbers with forage capacity.

# 31 Desired Conditions

- Sustainable livestock grazing contributes to the long-term socioeconomic diversity and stability
  of local communities.
- Rangelands are resilient to disturbances, fluctuations, and extremes in the natural environment
  (e.g.,e.g., fire, flood, drought, climate variability).
- Livestock grazing and associated management activities promote healthy, diverse plant communities, satisfactory soil conditions, and maintain or improve wildlife habitat.
- Livestock management and range improvements prevent livestock from negatively impacting
  other resources.

## 1 Standards

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- Range improvement maintenance is assigned in Allotment Management Plans and include maintenance specifications that prevent livestock from negatively impacting ecological and cultural resources and extend the useful life of the improvement.
- Range improvements are maintained to standards outlined in grazing permits or are removed or
  decommissioned when no longer needed.

### 7 Guidelines

- Grazing use should be managed at conservative levels (30 to 40 percent) using rotational grazing systems.
- Salt or mineral supplements should not be placed within a quarter mile of riparian or wetland areas or other areas where livestock concentrations are undesired.
- New spring developments should not completely dewater the spring and should maintain a residual flow for riparian obligate vegetation and wildlife species.
- Drought preparedness is emphasized in Allotment Management Plans and may include flexible
  stocking rates/livestock classes, flexible rotation schedules, and other strategies for dealing with
  climate variability.
- Livestock use should avoid grazing the same wetland/riparian areas at the same time, year after
  year. Exceptions to this may include, but are not limited to, trailing systems that may be adjacent
  to wetland/riparian areas due to topography constraints.
- Vacant allotments and permits that are waived without preference should be evaluated for one of
  the following options:
  - Conversion to forage reserves to improve resource management flexibility.
- 23 Grant to nearby permittees to form logical grazing management units.
- 24 Closure to permitted grazing, in whole or in part.
- Allotments comprised of large percentages of Desert Ecological Response Units (Sonora-Mojave Mixed Salt Desert Scrub, Sonoran Paloverde-Mixed Cactus Desert Scrub, and Sonoran Mid-Elevation Desert Scrub) should be closed, in whole or in part, as they become vacant.

## 28 Management Approaches

- Forest managers work continually with permittees to adjust timing, intensity, and frequency of
  livestock grazing to respond to changing resource conditions; grazing pressures that affect
  sedimentation on soil compaction; excessive impacts to wetlands and riparian areas; and needs of
  the grazing permittees.
- Range managers use a cooperative approach, work with permittees, local, county, state, and
  federal government entities, and non-government organizations and develop partnerships to
  facilitate flexible and balanced permitted use.
- The Tonto NF uses an adaptive management strategy to manage the rangeland resources.
  Allotment management plans and associated grazing authorization decisions are updated as
  needed to conform to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable laws.

- Within the scope of the grazing decisions, fine-tune adjustments are made annually through the
  annual operating instructions. Information from monitoring informs appropriate adjustments.
  Grazing intensity in combination with other factors such as weather patterns, likelihood of plant
  regrowth, and previous years' utilization levels is used in determinations. Authorized numbers
  may be adjusted accordingly. The grazing decision and associated allotment management plan is
  implemented through the term grazing permit and annual operating instructions (AOI). The AOI
  may also change season of use and pasture rest periods.
- Allotment Management Plans allow structural range improvements to be added or removed as
  needed to meet desired conditions in conformance with applicable laws and regulations.
- When utilizing prescribed burns for restoring perennial grasslands, allow areas to rest from grazing (some may only require 3 or less growing seasons while others may require more growing seasons) to build sufficient fuel loads based on site potential (based on the Terrestrial Ecological Unit or other suitable scientific protocol or method.