

Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing (GRZ)

Rangelands are grasslands, shrublands, forests and woodlands, wetlands, and deserts that can be grazed by domestic livestock or wild animals. Livestock grazing can be used to manage rangelands by harvesting available forage to produce livestock, managing plant composition, or reducing fuel loads. Sustainable and productive rangelands are one of the key ecosystem services on the Tonto National Forest. Rangelands contribute to a traditional western way of life and are essential for the survival of many small ranching operations and contribute to the economics of the surrounding communities. Rangelands and the associated range improvements (e.g., ponds, troughs, fences, corrals, windmills) provide scenery and recreational (e.g., hunting, wildlife viewing) opportunities to the public and provide habitat for numerous species.

Congress has designated grazing as an important use of National Forest System lands through various legislative acts (Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976). Regulations include that “forage-producing National Forest System lands will be managed for livestock grazing and the allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans” (36 CFR 222.2) and “all grazing and livestock use on National Forest System lands ... must be authorized by a grazing or livestock use permit” (36 CFR 222.3). Ranchers are issued permits to graze a specific number of livestock in designated areas.

Rangelands are divided into grazing units called allotments. Allotment boundaries often follow topographical features such as ridgelines or creeks, and may or may not be fenced entirely. Allotments are further subdivided into pastures, and most allotments follow some kind of rotational grazing system where livestock are moved through different pastures as the year progresses. Allotment and pasture boundaries are changed administratively as needed.

Nearly the entire Tonto National Forest is divided into grazing allotments; however, a few allotments are considered vacant (no current permittee) or closed (no longer authorized for permitted livestock grazing). Status of allotments are dynamic so a list of open, vacant, and closed allotments in this plan would not be useful. Over the last decade, the Tonto National Forest has worked with partners and permittees to reduce grazing pressure on sensitive areas (e.g., critical areas, riparian area). Currently, the Tonto National Forest manages the rangeland resources to balance livestock numbers with forage capacity.

Forage for range production is one of the key ecosystem services provided by the Tonto National Forest. The plan components for [Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing](#) help provide this service for the future. See Chapter 1. Introduction for more information about [key ecosystem services](#).

Refer to the [Vegetation Ecological Response Units](#), [Watersheds and Water Resources](#), [Riparian Areas, Seeps, Springs, Wetlands, and Riparian Management Zones](#), and [Wildlife, Fish and Plants](#) sections in Chapter 2. Forestwide Plan Direction and the sections in [Chapter 3. Management Areas Plan Direction](#) for additional applicable plan direction.

Desired Conditions (GRZ-DC)

- 01 Sustainable livestock grazing contributes to the long-term socioeconomic diversity and stability of local communities.
- 02 Rangelands are resilient to disturbances, fluctuations, and extremes in the natural environment (e.g., fire, flooding, drought, climate variability).
- 03 Livestock grazing allows for healthy, diverse plant communities⁹, satisfactory soil conditions, and sustains the quality of wildlife habitat.

⁹ Desired conditions for plant communities can be found in the Vegetation and Ecological Response Units section.

- 04 Livestock management and range improvements sustain or improve other resource.

Objectives (GRZ-O)

- 01 At least 2 water troughs or open storage tanks per ranger district will be fitted with wildlife escape ramps each year until all troughs and tanks have ramps.
- 02 At least one vacant allotment will be evaluated for one of the following options every two years, until there are no vacant allotments. If additional allotments become vacant (waived without preference) they will be evaluated for one or a combination of the following options within two years:
- 03 Conversion to forage reserves to improve resource management flexibility.
- 04 Grant to current or new permitted livestock producer.
- 05 Closure to permitted grazing, in whole or in part.

Guidelines (GRZ-G)

- 01 Range improvements should be maintained to specifications to provide their intended function and extend the useful life of the improvement. Range improvements should be removed or decommissioned when no longer needed.
- 02 Salt or mineral supplements should not be placed near riparian, wetland, or other areas where livestock concentrations are undesired.
- 03 Drought preparedness should be emphasized in Allotment Management Plans and may include flexible stocking rates/livestock classes, flexible rotation schedules, and other strategies for dealing with climate variability.
- 04 Livestock rotations should avoid grazing the same areas during the growing season at the same time, year after year.
- 05 Wildlife escape ramps should be installed in all livestock water troughs and open storage tanks.
- 06 Efforts (e.g., coordination with permittees, temporary fencing, increased herding, and herding dogs) should be made to prevent transfer of disease from domestic sheep and goats to bighorn sheep wherever bighorn sheep occur. Conversions to domestic sheep or goats should not be allowed in areas adjacent to or inhabited by bighorn sheep.
- 07 Allotments and other areas closed to permitted livestock grazing should remain closed.¹⁰
- 08 When unauthorized livestock are found occupying National Forest lands, the owner should be promptly notified to remove them and prevent them from re-entering National Forest lands. If the owner is unknown or uncooperative, impoundment procedures should be initiated.

Management Approaches for Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing

- 01 Coordinate permittees' grazing schedules with planned prescribed fire treatments to ensure there will be sufficient fuel to allow burn objectives to be met and forage available for permittee.

¹⁰ Closed means an area or allotment will no longer be authorized for livestock grazing. Allotments are closed by project level decisions.

- 02 Forest managers work continually with permittees to adjust timing, intensity, and frequency of livestock grazing to respond to changing resource conditions.
- 03 Consider allowing structural range improvements to be added or removed to meet desired conditions in conformance with applicable laws and regulations in the Allotment Management Plan.
- 04 Range managers use a cooperative approach working with permittees, local, county, state, and federal government entities, and non-government organizations and develop partnerships to facilitate flexible and balanced permitted use.
- 05 Encourage the development of water sources in uplands (including wells) where possible to improve or restore riparian areas.
- 06 Work with partners (e.g., University of Arizona and Friends of the Tonto) to complete rangeland monitoring (e.g., Reading the Range and riparian photo points).