

**DECISION NOTICE
TANK CREEK
GRAZING ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
BRADSHAW RANGER DISTRICT
PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST
YAVAPAI COUNTY, AZ**

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Tank Creek Grazing Allotment Management Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, which will authorize livestock grazing on the allotment as follows:

To combine the Tank Creek and Tonto Mountain Allotments into one allotment and naming it the Tank Creek Allotment. Authorize a range of livestock numbers from 375 - 405 head of adult cattle, cow/calf pairs and bulls yearlong, not to exceed 4860 AUMs. Livestock will be managed on a deferred rotation system. The annual authorization will vary based on adaptive management, considering forage production, water availability, and resource conditions. Annual stocking could fall below the low end of the proposed stocking range. Pasture rest and deferment will be scheduled to provide for achieving desired resource conditions.

The term grazing permit for the allotment will be issued for up to ten years. The permit will authorize livestock use within parameters identified in this proposal, and subsequent permits may be issued as long as resources continue to move further toward desired conditions or are being maintained in satisfactory condition, as appropriate.

¹ Animal Unit Month (AUM) – The quantity of forage required by one mature cow (1,000 pounds) or the equivalent for 1 month; approximately 26 lbs. of dry forage per day is required by one mature cow or equivalent.

OTHER COMPONENTS OF ALTERNATIVE 1

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is designed to provide sufficient flexibility to allow livestock management to address changes in climatic conditions, seasonal fluctuations in forage production, and other dynamic influences on the ecosystem in order to effectively make progress toward or maintain desired conditions of the rangeland and other resources. Under the adaptive management approach, regular/annual monitoring of short-term indicators determines if there is a need for administrative changes in livestock management. If monitoring indicates that progress toward desired conditions is not being achieved on the allotment, management will be modified. Modifications can include adjustments in timing, intensity, and duration of grazing. Timing is the time of year the livestock are present in a pasture. Intensity is the degree to which forage is removed through grazing and trampling by livestock. Duration is the length of time livestock are present in a given pasture. These modifications would be made through administrative decisions such as: the specific number of head stocked on the allotment annually or in a particular season; the class of animals stocked (cow/calf pairs vs. yearlings, steers or heifers, etc.); specific dates of grazing; livestock herd movement; and periods of rest, deferment, or non-use of portions or all of the allotment for an appropriate period of time, as conditions warrant. Such changes will not result in exceeding the AUMs authorized for livestock use that is included in the selected alternative.

Best Management Practices

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are a practice or combination of practices determined to be the most effective, practicable means of preventing or reducing the amount of pollution generated by nonpoint sources to a level compatible with water quality goals, and are developed to comply with the Clean Water Act (FSH 2509.22_10.5). The Interdisciplinary Team followed the guidance in the Southwest Region Forest Service Handbook 2509.22, Chapter 20, and the National Core BMP Technical Guide, FS-990a, in the formulation of resource protection measures related to range management that also function as BMPs to address water quality and watershed concerns. These resource protection measures will be implemented in order to comply with the Clean Water Act.

New Range Improvements: Structural & Non Structural Range Improvements

This alternative includes construction of the following new structural improvements that have been developed to address resource concerns or improve grazing management. Monitoring may indicate that some of these improvements are not necessary; however, different types of water developments may be employed depending on the location.

Structural Range Improvements:

Because of limited road access for large vehicles like well-drilling rigs, the proposed water developments on the Tank Creek Allotment would likely be trick tanks (catchment apron that directs rainfall into a storage tank and pipeline system with troughs), or earthen stock tanks (dug out areas that collect rainfall directed from shallow ditches).

The following are the proposed Structural Range Improvements:

- Construct 1 reliable water development (Windmill or Trick Tank) in Tonto Pasture on the west side, in the northeast corner of section 16.
- Construct 1 reliable water development (Windmill or Trick Tank) in D1 East Pasture on the south side, in the center of section 16 at Juniper spring development.
- Construct 1 reliable water development (Windmill or Trick Tank) between D1 East and D1 west Pastures in the southwest corner of section 8.
- Construct 1 reliable water development (Windmill or Trick Tank) in D1 West Pasture in the middle of the current pasture and on the proposed fence line to divide the pasture, in the southwest corner of section 11.
- Construct a north south fence to split the D1 West pasture into D1 West and Twin Buttes pastures.
- Construct an east-west fence to split South Pasture into Tank Creek and Bald Mountain Pastures.
- Construct fence within the Sycamore Pasture to include a portion of that pasture into the new Tank Creek Pasture.
- Construct a water-lot and corral fence around a tank on Sycamore mesa in the Sycamore/Dougherty Pasture to better control livestock use patterns.
- Add a 30,000 gallon storage tank to existing trick tank in South pasture in section 5.
- Extend the Sycamore Exclosure pasture fence (approximately 250 yards) in the far western portion of the exclosure pasture to secure the exclosure.
- If and when the Burnt Wash #2 or the Jack Jones spring tanks require maintenance, the permittee will contact the USFS Tank Creek Allotment Permit Administrator. The USFS would install a “drop structure” to provide a self-cleaning mechanism for the spring tank(s). If it is determined that the drop structure is unsuccessful, the permittee can perform maintenance of the spring tanks with a backhoe.



The following are the proposed Non-Structural Range Improvements:

Vegetation Treatments:

Potential Natural Vegetation Type	Treatment type	Treatment Acres
Piñon-Juniper Evergreen Shrub	Use mechanical treatment and wildland ¹ fire to open canopy to < 30% Maintain < 30% tree canopy with mechanical treatment and wildland fire	1,687
Semi-Desert Grassland	Use wildland fire and hand thinning to reduce overstory canopy Maintain grassland and open canopy with wildland fire and hand thinning	2,436
Juniper Grassland	Mechanical treatment to open canopy Maintain conditions with wildland fire and mechanical treatment	4,310
Interior Chaparral	Maintain vegetation conditions with wildland fire May use mechanical treatment to protect piñon and alligator juniper trees and create fire lines around WUI	3,364
Totals		11,797

Roads

The Forest Service is proposing to reroute two short sections of Forest Roads 9405C and 9400A on the Bradshaw Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest.

Forest Roads 9405C and 9400A veer off National Forest System lands and onto private property in two locations; one for approximately one-tenth mile and one for approximately one-quarter mile. In order to ensure continued access to administer the permit and for the public, and to reduce the risk of impacts to private property from the continued use of the roads, the Forest Service has determined it would be best to relocate those sections of road so that they are on National Forest System lands.

Maintenance of Range Improvements: The Term Grazing Permit includes a list of all improvements which the permittee will continue to maintain at a level that effectively provides for their intended uses and purposes. Range improvements will be inspected periodically during the term of the permit to document condition. Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) will identify range improvements in need of maintenance. Existing improvements may be replaced when conditions warrant.

¹ Wildland Fire – (Forest Plan Glossary page 150) – Wildland fire is any non-structural fire that occurs in vegetation or natural fuels. It includes both wildfires and prescribed fires.

Access to Improvements: Authorization for cross-country motorized travel is provided for the permittee to administer the livestock operation and maintain improvements under the terms and conditions of the Term Grazing Permit.

Annual authorization for actions implementing management direction in the Allotment Management Plan will be included in the Annual Operating Instructions, such as a description of the anticipated level of cross- county travel, travel needed for improvement maintenance, new improvement construction, or reconstruction of existing improvements.

All authorizations for cross-country motorized travel are subject to existing regulations intended to protect natural and/or heritage resources. Cross-country travel is not allowed when such travel would cause unacceptable resource damage.

Monitoring

In order to evaluate whether grazing management is making progress towards meeting desired resource conditions, two types of monitoring will be conducted:

1. Implementation monitoring will be conducted by the Forest Service, with possible assistance from the permittee, and may include but is not limited to the following: livestock actual use data, compliance with pasture rotation schedules, grazing intensity evaluations during the grazing season (within key and critical areas), utilization at the end of the growing season (within key areas), and visual observations of vegetation and ground cover.
2. Effectiveness monitoring to evaluate the success of management in achieving the desired objectives will occur within key areas at an interval of ten (10) years or less. A smaller subset of key areas may be evaluated that are in the areas needing improvement as identified in the EA. Areas already meeting desired conditions can be visually assessed to determine if conditions are being maintained. Effectiveness monitoring may also be conducted if data and observations from implementation monitoring (annual monitoring) indicate a need. This type of monitoring can include species composition, plant cover, frequency or density, and/or vegetative ground cover monitored at key areas and at areas identified with site-specific resource concerns. Both qualitative and quantitative monitoring methods can be used. Methods for monitoring and inventory that are standard, accepted protocols can be found in the following publications: Region 3 Rangeland Analysis and Management Training Guide (USDA 2013 revised), Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health (Technical Reference 1730-37, 2010), and the Guide to Rangeland Monitoring and Assessment (Smith et al. 2012).

Monitoring activities would be focused on those resources that need improvement or where there is a concern for an important habitat type.

Site-specific measures are summarized as follows:

1. Stevens trap Pasture TEUI 427

- a. Incidental use of 0-30% would be authorized in this soil map unit until satisfactory progress towards similarity (increased diversity) and groundcover objectives have been achieved.

- b. Integrate seasonal deferment or rest, use pasture to hold livestock for short periods.
- c. Improve livestock access when not using the trap by closing gates and checking to make sure livestock do not re-enter the pasture after short period of use.

2. Sycamore enclosure Pasture TEUI 430

- a. Improve water gaps and make sure fence maintenance is completed to keep livestock out of pasture. Extend fence approximately 250 yards to the west to secure the pasture.
- b. No use will be authorized in this enclosure pasture until satisfactory progress toward improved graminoid cover and improved spatial distribution of vegetation to improve soil organic matter, soil stability, and to assist in improving compacted soils is met. Once this progress has been met then use could be authorized once every 3-5 years with an allowable use of 30% on key upland species, and up to 50-60% leaders browsed on key upland woody species;
- c. Minimum stubble height on key riparian herbaceous species: four to six inches where sedges and rushes are key and eight inches where deer grass is key; Up to 20% use by weight on key woody species within riparian areas; or less than 50% of terminal leaders browsed on woody species less than 6 feet tall on key riparian species.

3. D1 West Pasture TEUI 448

- a. There is low similarity between existing perennial grass cover and composition as compared to what the soil is capable of supporting. This area requires vegetation treatments of prescribed fire and mechanical methods to remove the brush in order to improve the perennial grass cover and composition.

Once desired conditions for vegetation or soil are being met in areas needing improvement, the allotment-wide utilization standards could be applied.

DECISION RATIONALE

I have selected Alternative 1 because it meets the purpose and need for action described in the EA while allowing desired conditions to be achieved over the long term for the landscapes where the allotment is located. I have also factored into my decision Alternative 2 would also allow desired conditions to be met, but it would not meet the Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands, nor would it comply with Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing, while contributing to the economic and social well-being of people by providing opportunities for economic diversity and by promoting stability for communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood (FSM 2203.1, 2202.1).

The Tank Creek Grazing Allotment Management EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Notice of the intention to initiate the present analysis of the proposed action for this allotment was provided in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/> beginning in January of 2016 and was updated regularly. A scoping letter dated January 19,

2017 describing the proposed action was sent to the permit holder of the allotment and to members of the public, non-profit groups, and other entities who have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to State and Federal government entities and to six Native American Tribes interested in activities in the area inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The content of the scoping responses was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official and resulted in the identification of no additional issues for the allotments that were not addressed within the design criteria of the proposed action.

The Environmental Assessment for the Tank Creek Grazing Allotment Management was mailed to scoping respondents and the grazing permittees, and a legal notice announcing the start of the 30-day comment period was posted in the Prescott Daily Courier newspaper on May 12, 2017. There were six responses received during the 30-day comment period. The responses were reviewed by resource specialists and the Deciding Official to determine if any new information was received that would have bearing on a decision between the two alternatives. No new concerns were raised by the comments. The comments and responses are located in the back of the final Environmental Assessment as Appendix 5.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality.

Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

Context

The context for the management of the allotment is local in nature and would not have notable impacts beyond the project area. The Tank Creek and Tonto Mountain Allotments represent an area of approximately 39,000 acres. These allotments are located in the northwest portion of the district, approximately 5 miles north of Skull Valley, AZ and approximately 15 miles west of Prescott, AZ. The allotments are bordered by the Smith Canyon and Toohey Allotments on the north and west, and deeded land on the west, and Buckhorn, Brushy, and Contreras Allotment on the south.

Vegetation on both allotments consists primarily of piñon and juniper with evergreen shrub and interior chaparral plant species. Canopy cover from shrub species is moderately to extremely thick in some locations to the extent that herbaceous forage is reduced or absent. A portion of the forage base of the allotment is provided by browse species such as turbinella oak with mountain mahogany, deerbrush, and skunkbrush found in smaller quantities. Perennial grasses can be locally abundant, especially in juniper woodlands that have been previously thinned and on warmer southern aspects of hills. Important forage grasses on the allotments include blue grama, sideoats grama, threeawns, sand dropseed, tobosa, curlymesquite, and squirreltail.

Precipitation patterns for these areas are bi-modal with monsoon events occurring during the summer and a second period of precipitation occurring within the winter season. Precipitation at the Chino

Valley station recorded 13.7" for 2015, 8.85" for 2016. These records can be found on the internet at the site: www.wrcc.dri.edu for the Western Regional Climate Center. For the period of record from 1941 to 2016, the mean annual precipitation was 11.9". Cool-season precipitation (October through May) for this timeframe had a mean of 6.2", and summer precipitation (June through September) accounted for 5.7". The average minimum temperature typically occurs in December, and is around 20 degrees F, and the average maximum temperature occurs in July at just over 90 degrees F.

Bagdad has precipitation and temperature records from 1925 to 2012 found at the same internet site. For a period of record from 1925 to 2012, the mean annual precipitation was 14.4". Cool-season precipitation (October through May for this timeframe had a mean of 9.4", and summer precipitation (June through September) accounted for 5". The average minimum temperature typically occurs in January, and is around 32 degrees F, and the average maximum temperature occurs in July at 96 degrees F.

Recreational activity on these allotments is primarily associated with dispersed camping, off road vehicle use, and hunting. Access to the allotment is not limited in the sense that the Forest Service has no restrictions on access; the agency has no authority over gates and fences on private property. There are some motorized trails on both allotments that receive some use from off-highway vehicles, although these trails are rough and often used only by experienced riders. There are no developed recreation sites for camping on either allotment. Big game hunting opportunities exist for deer, elk, bear, and javelina. There are no designated wilderness areas on either allotment.

Intensity

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial. Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because rangeland management activities similar to those described in the EA have occurred in this area, as well as over most of the Forest, without issues related to public health and safety.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) within the allotment and no wilderness areas. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches. The allotment is known to contain cultural resources of both prehistoric and historic periods. The level of need and extent of new field surveys or inspections for grazing impacts will be determined by the Forest Archaeologist. Complete field surveys of any given allotment or grouping of allotments will not be required.

These procedures comply with the First Amended Programmatic Agreement Regarding Historic Property Protection and Responsibilities between the USDA Forest Service Region 3, the State Historic Preservation Officers of AZ, NM, TX, and OK, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, signed 12/24/2003, and specifically, Appendix H: the Standard Consultation Protocol for Rangeland Management, signed 05/17/2007. A no adverse effect on the cultural

resources is based on the Forest Service's proposal to continue the authorization of livestock grazing under an adaptive management system and in a manner consistent with the goals and objectives and the standards and guidelines of the PNF Land and Resource Management Plan. If cultural resources are located where new range improvements are proposed then the resources will be avoided during the implementation of the projects.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. This environmental analysis is tiered to the Land Management Plan (LMP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Forest-wide effects of LMP's standards were disclosed in that EIS. The selected alternative with the identified resource protection measures meets LMP standards. In addition, extensive scoping was completed during the analysis in order to identify areas of potential controversy. The scoping activities are identified in the EA, this Decision Notice, and the project record. There has been no information presented that would demonstrate that the action would cause adverse impacts that could not be mitigated. I conclude that it is very unlikely that the environmental effects associated with the action will be highly controversial.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The Agency has considerable experience with actions that are similar to the selected alternative. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. This action is similar to many past actions, both in this analysis area and adjacent areas. Effects of this action will be similar to the effects of past, similar actions. Livestock grazing has occurred on the Prescott National Forest for over 100 years. The Interdisciplinary Team that conducted the analysis used the results of past actions as a frame of reference, and combined that insight with scientifically accepted analytical techniques and best available information to estimate effects of the proposal.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because it is a stand-alone decision and each grazing allotment is evaluated independently on its own merits. Major follow-up actions will not be necessary. I conclude that this action does not establish precedent for future actions.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The cumulative impacts have been displayed in this analysis in both the EA and in specialist reports contained in the project record. Cumulative impacts in the EA discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA, specialist reports, and information identified during public review, I have concluded that there are no significant, cumulative impacts.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Areas proposed for ground- disturbing activities

will be surveyed and all cultural resources or historic sites will be avoided. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be completed prior to signing this decision.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. There are no Federally-listed Threatened or Endangered species or designated habitat within the project area. The Wildlife, Fisheries, and Rare Plants Report serves as the Biological Evaluation for the Tank Creek Allotment and documents the effects on species and habitat.

Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. This project is fully consistent with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Clean Water Act, and the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976.

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP). The project was designed in conformance with LMP direction concerning resources including range management; soils, watershed and riparian areas; wildlife, rare plant, fish, and aquatic species; and heritage resources.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were evaluated to determine if further analysis is needed. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

The National Environmental Policy Act provisions have been followed as required by 40 CFR 1500 and 36 CFR 220. The EA discloses the expected impacts of each alternative and discusses the identified issues. This document describes the decision I have made and my rationale for the decision.

The selected alternative complies with the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and any potentially affected tribes have been consulted. Documentation of surveys conducted for new range improvements that will be implemented within 2 years of this decision will be submitted to the SHPO for concurrence prior to finalizing this decision.

Water quality standards will be met. There are no classified floodplains or wetlands within the project area.

Implementation Date

If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day from the close of the objection filing period. When objections are filed, there will be a 45-day period to resolve the objection.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Sarah Tomsy, Bradshaw District Ranger, Bradshaw Ranger District, (928) 443-8050.



09/26/17

Signature

Date

Sarah Tomsy, Bradshaw District Ranger

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