

**Decision Notice**  
**& Finding of No Significant Impact**  
for the  
**Verde Rim Livestock Grazing Project**  
**Bald Hill, Copper Canyon, Squaw Peak, and Young Allotments**

USDA Forest Service

Verde Ranger District, Prescott National Forest

Yavapai County, Arizona

Legal Description: T.12, 121/2, 13 & 14 N, R.4 & 5 E, Gila and Salt River Meridian

## **Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

### **Background**

This analysis was initiated in response to regulation [36 CFR 222 Subpart A, 222.2 ©] that states, "Forage producing National Forest System lands (NFS) will be managed for livestock grazing and the allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans". This direction was followed and is contained in the Land Management Plan for the Prescott National Forest (PR# 1).

The purpose and need for this project is to authorize continued livestock grazing on the allotments making up the Verde Rim Livestock Grazing project (Bald Hill, Copper Canyon, Squaw Peak and Young) through the issuance of 10-year term permits for each allotment containing the parameters under which livestock grazing would be implemented. Authorizing and implementing livestock grazing is based on managing the effects of grazing on associated resources, not solely in managing forage production (Environmental Assessment [EA] page 1-2). Laws regulating grazing currently permitted on the Verde Rim Allotments require a periodic review of the effects (EA page 1-2). The scope of the decision to be made is limited to grazing management (EA pages 1-7 and 1-8). The Verde Rim Livestock Grazing Project Environmental Assessment (EA) of February 2006 documents the analysis (PR# 134).

The 15,711 acre Bald Hill Allotment is located approximately 6 miles south of Camp Verde, AZ and runs from Pinto Mesa south-east to Bald Hill (Figure 1). Elevations on the allotment range from 3800 ft. to 6200 ft. Pinyon/juniper and juniper/chaparral dominate the vegetative communities present on the allotment.

The 10,205 acre Copper Canyon Allotment is located approximately 3 miles south of Camp Verde, AZ (Figure 1). Elevations on the allotment range from 3280 ft. to 5280 ft. Pinyon/juniper communities occupy the mid to upper elevations and Desert shrub communities dominate the lower elevations of the allotment.

The 12,600 acre Squaw Peak Allotment is located approximately 5 miles south of Camp Verde, AZ and lies adjacent to the Copper Canyon Allotment (Figure 1). Elevations on the allotment range from 3200 ft. to 6525 ft. Pinyon/juniper communities dominate the upper elevations while Desert shrub communities are found in the lower elevations.

The 964 acre Young Allotment is located approximately 3 miles south of Camp Verde, AZ and borders both the Copper Canyon and Squaw Peak Allotments (Figure 1). Elevations on the allotment range from 3100 ft. to 3600 ft. Desert shrub communities dominate the allotment.

The EA and Project Record are available for review at the Verde Ranger District Office, 300 E. Highway 260, Camp Verde, Arizona.

#### Decision

Based on the EA for this project, comments received during this analysis and my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement **Alternative 4 – Modified Proposed Action for the grazing strategy and range improvements on the Verde Rim Livestock Grazing Project Allotments as described below.**

#### A. Grazing Strategy and Range Improvements

##### **Bald Hill Allotment:**

- The term grazing permit will be issued for a year-long livestock grazing season with a range of 1465 – 2064 animal months.
- A four-pasture deferred rotation will be used in conjunction with two small intermittently used pastures keeping the Arnold Pasture winter-use only since the pasture has a high proportion of chaparral vegetation and a low grass component.
- Establish allowable use levels on key upland forage species of 40% (except in the Bates and Bull Pastures where it will be 30%). Allowable use levels will be measured during the growing season and used as an indicator for pasture moves.
- Establish a forage utilization level on key upland forage species of 50% (except in the Bates and Bull Pastures where it will be 30%). Utilization levels will be measured at end of the grazing season. The three main and the two small non-winter pastures may be entered more than once during the year if duration of grazing during growing seasons is kept short and continued plant growth allows for re-entry.
- Establish a utilization level of upland browse species of 50% on current year's production of available leaders.
- Extend the existing riparian enclosure on Cienega Creek north to the Durfee/Bald Hill Pasture division fence and the existing enclosure at Reimer Springs downstream into the Bald Hill Pasture, while leaving access for cattle watering.
- Additional riparian enclosures will be constructed adjacent to the private land on Cienega Creek and along Arnold Canyon, to contain areas with the highest riparian potential.
- Construct three-Quarter miles of rangeland fencing (to wildlife standards – EA Chapter 2) along the south-side of the old ranch headquarters private land tract (now sub-divided) to form a small holding pasture.

##### **Copper Canyon Allotment:**

- The term grazing permit will be issued for year-long livestock grazing with a range of 840 - 1200 animal months.

- A four-pasture deferred rotation will be used in conjunction with two small pastures keeping the Tompkins Pasture winter-use only to aid in the protection of riparian areas in the Copper Canyon drainage.
- Restrict livestock use in Copper Canyon Pasture during an April 1 – July 31 time period each year to provide a cowbird buffer zone for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.
- Control duration of use in the desert shrub communities of the Cottonwood and Lucky Pastures using salting and herding techniques.
- Establish allowable use levels on key upland forage species of 40% (except in the Cottonwood Pasture where it will be 30%). Allowable use will be measured during the growing season and will be used as an indicator for pasture moves.
- Establish allowable use levels of 20% on riparian vegetation. Allowable use will be measured during the growing season and will be used as an indicator for pasture moves.
- Establish a forage utilization level on key upland forage species of 50% (except in the Cottonwood Pasture where it will be 30%). Utilization levels will be measured at end of grazing season. The three main and the two small non-winter pastures may be entered more than once during the year if continued plant growth allows for re-entry.
- Establish a forage utilization level of 20% on riparian vegetation. Utilization levels will be measured at end of growing season.
- Burn under prescription approximately 550 acres of desert shrub/grassland community to sustain existing herbaceous ground cover by reducing prickly pear cactus, juniper, and mesquite.

#### **Squaw Peak Allotment:**

- The term grazing permit will be issued for year-long livestock grazing with a range of 540 - 720 animal months.
- The allotment will be managed as three grazing areas, one at higher elevations, and two at lower elevations, since topography does not allow for cross fencing. Deferment of grazing areas will be accomplished by control of water access and herding.
- Establish allowable use and utilization levels of 25% on key forage grasses and 40% on browse species. Allowable use will be measured during the growing season and will be used as an indicator for grazing area moves. Utilization levels will be measured at end of grazing season.
- Construct a waterlot around the bottom trough and overflow on the North Mine Spring pipeline and around each of the bottom troughs and overflow on the Lower Mine Spring pipeline to control livestock use.

#### **Young Allotment:**

- The term grazing permit will be issued for year-long livestock grazing with a range of not to exceed 108 animal months.
- The allotment will be managed as a single pasture.
- Allow livestock grazing during the same growing season (spring or summer) no more than two years in a row.

- Restrict livestock use during an April 1 – July 31 time period (if grazing is authorized during this time period in any given year) to provide a cowbird buffer zone for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.
- Establish utilization levels on key forage species of 40%. Utilization levels will be measured at end of the grazing season.

### B. Adaptive Management

#### **All Project Allotments**

- Stocking will be adjusted within the range of numbers, as determined by monitoring. Stocking could be less than the range in any given year to allow for extreme fluctuations of weather and available forage.
- The period of grazing will be determined by monitoring and designated in the Annual Operating Instructions.
- The timing, intensity, and/or duration of grazing in any pasture (Bald Hill, Copper Canyon), grazing area (Squaw Peak) or allotment (Young) will be adjusted as needed to achieve resource objectives.

#### **Bald Hill Allotment:**

- Additional vegetation growth will be allowed before any re-entry to a pasture.
- Areas that later exhibit riparian attributes (which may not now be apparent because of drought conditions) will be fenced or protected from livestock grazing impacts through management actions controlling timing and intensity of livestock use.

#### **Copper Canyon Allotment:**

- Additional vegetation growth will be allowed before any re-entry to a pasture.
- In the event early movement from the Tompkins Pasture is required due to reaching riparian allowable use/utilization levels, additional riparian exclosures will be constructed.
- In the event disproportionate use occurs in Lucky Pasture on unsatisfactory soil areas, a 1/3 mile fence will be constructed to control use.
- Areas that later exhibit riparian attributes (which may not now be apparent because of drought conditions) will be fenced or protected from livestock grazing impacts through management actions controlling timing and intensity of livestock use.
- In the event pasture rotations deferring Copper Canyon Pasture April to July for the cow bird buffer zone can not be achieved, drift fences on the ridge northwest of the Copper Canyon drainage will be constructed. This will allow use of the northern part of the pasture that is beyond the 2 miles needed for the buffer zone (EA Chapter 2).
- The Monroe Pasture, while not scheduled in the rotation, will be used when needed.

#### **Squaw Peak Allotment:**

- Thinning as much as 100 acres of juniper in the watershed immediately above Squaw Peak Tank to reduce sediment flow into the tank and increase available water storage, if livestock can not be held long enough in the higher elevation grazing area to achieve deferment in the lower grazing areas.

- In the event livestock do not fully move from one pipeline serviced area to another, herding and salting will be employed to keep them moving until they stay in the desired area.

### C. Mitigation Actions Required

#### **All Project Allotments:**

Best Management Practices for soil, water, and wildlife maintenance and protection will be incorporated into the allotment management plans. Practices include but are not limited to:

- Preparation of an annual operating procedure with the permittee to allow for consideration of current allotment conditions and management objectives.
- Periodic field checks to identify needed adjustments in season of use and/or livestock numbers.
- Periodic field checks to measure forage use to determine if allowable use levels are being reached and inform the permittee of needed pasture movement.
- Periodic field checks to assess vegetation health and trend as well as soil function.
- Application of standard practices such as salting, herding, and controlling access to water to achieve proper distribution or lessen the impact on areas which are sensitive or are natural concentration areas.
- Grazing pastures with riparian ecosystems primarily during plant dormancy periods or constructing/maintaining riparian enclosure fencing.
- Troughs or mineral supplements will not be placed within ¼ mile of any identified sensitive plant population and new improvements (e.g. pipelines, tanks, or fences) will not go through any such population.
- All new or reconstructed fencing would be built to accommodate wildlife passage using a 4-strand fence with a smooth bottom wire 16 inches off the ground and a total fence height of 42 inches or less.
- All new or reconstructed water developments would include wildlife access and escape ramps.
- Livestock use in Copper Canyon Pasture (Copper Canyon Allotment) and the Young Allotment would be restricted during an April 1 – July 31 time period each year to provide a cowbird buffer zone for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.
- Cooperate with permittees to make stock water supplies available for wildlife needs during critical periods, if water is available at the sources (e.g. storage tank) and livestock rotations would not be disrupted.

### D. Monitoring Actions Required

#### **All Project Allotments:**

Short-term monitoring will be conducted using tools such as the Rangeland Health Checklist which documents utilization levels and short-term indicators of rangeland health in key areas. This checklist will be used to determine if adjustments in stocking, duration of grazing, or the season of use are needed. Utilization monitoring will be consistent with methods in the Interagency Technical Reference - Utilization Studies and Residual Measurements (USDI 1996).

Long-term monitoring will be conducted using methods consistent with methods in the Interagency Technical Reference - Sampling Vegetation Attributes (USDI 1996), Proper Functioning Condition (USDI 1998), Soil Condition field evaluation form and Forest Service

Handbooks. These methods will be used to determine whether management actions are effective in achieving or moving toward desired project objectives, i.e. plant diversity, soil function, and riparian vegetation potential.

## Reasons for the Decision

The primary considerations I used in selecting Alternative 4 are (a) responsiveness to the significant public issues (b) responsiveness to the project Purpose and Need

This alternative is responsive to the significant public issues (EA Chapter 1 – Public Issues, Chapter 2 – Description of Alternatives, Chapter 3 – Responses to Significant Issues):

*1) The proposed utilization levels are too high.*

This alternative reduces forage utilization in the Bates/Bull Pasture (Bald Hill Allotment), Cottonwood Pasture (Copper Canyon Allotment) and throughout the Squaw Peak Allotment where there are resource concerns making it more likely to improve the vegetation and soil resources under favorable climatic conditions.

*2) Riparian area protection is inadequate.*

All areas currently exhibiting riparian potential will be fenced or used only during the dormant season. Adaptive management will allow for areas that later exhibit riparian attributes (which may not now be apparent because of drought conditions) to be fenced or protected from livestock grazing impacts through management actions controlling timing and intensity of livestock use.

*3) Controlling access to water on Squaw Peak will not be successful.*

Waterlots will be constructed around key water sources which will alleviate the uncertainties associated with herding and will ensure livestock movement and deferment of grazing areas.

This alternative is responsive to the project Purpose and Need:

The alternative allows for the authorization of continued livestock grazing through the issuance of new 10-year term permits while protecting unique riparian areas and improving vegetative ground cover (VGC).

The VGC and perennial grass composition will improve towards attainable potential where not limited by juniper density. While juniper density control of Alternative 3 would allow for further improvements in VGC and soil function, such treatments are outside the scope of the project and are not necessary to the management of livestock on the allotments.

The reduction of desert shrub canopy cover will improve soil conditions on 550 acres in the Copper Canyon Allotment by improving herbaceous cover and thus soil function. Adaptive management will allow for adjustments in stocking and periods of use on unsatisfactory soils.

Soil condition is expected to improve in the Bates and Bull Pastures (Bald Hill Allotment), the Cottonwood Pasture (Copper Canyon Allotment) and throughout the Squaw Peak Allotment due to lower allowable use/utilization levels (EA pg 3-6).

Riparian fencing and maintenance of winter grazing schedules in select pastures will lead to a return of channel profile, riparian vegetation, and habitat quality in areas exhibiting a high potential to develop such vegetation (EA Table 2.6; Chapter 3).

Channel profiles will return to appropriate dimensions for site morphology and channel functions and watershed health will be maintained (EA Chapter 3).

Lower utilization, lower stocking, and waterlot construction will greatly improve the ability to apply grazing deferment on the Squaw Peak Allotment.

Forage and browse for livestock will be made available under direction contained in the Prescott National Forest Plan (Chapter 2 -Table 2.6; Chapter 3, PR# 1, 135).

Analysis of this alternative is consistent with NEPA and therefore is consistent with Section 504 (a) of the 1995 Rescission Act (Public Law 104-19).

### Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative I considered five (5) other alternatives (Four carried through the analysis and one eliminated from detailed study). The livestock management effects of the four alternatives carried through the analysis can be found in Chapter 3 of the EA. The five alternatives considered were not chosen for the stated reasons:

#### Alternative 1- No Action (No Livestock Grazing)

Management Parameter	Allotment			
	<i>Bald Hill</i>	<i>Copper Canyon</i>	<i>Squaw Peak</i>	<i>Young</i>
<b>Permitted Stocking (animal months)</b>	None – existing permits cancelled and not re-issued			
<b>Season of Use</b>	No livestock use			
<b>Number of Pastures / Grazing System</b>	None			
<b>Forage and Browse Utilization</b>	None – No livestock grazing			
<b>Riparian Area Use</b>	None – No livestock grazing			
<b>Range Structural Improvements</b>	Interior fences would be removed or gaps created. Maintenance responsibility for interior allotment boundary fences would be transferred to adjacent permit holder. The Forest Service would accept maintenance responsibility for retained water developments.			

This alternative does not meet the Purpose and Need of the project in that livestock grazing is not authorized nor permitted on the project allotments. Forage is not made available for livestock. The EA did not identify effects or consequences that warrant complete exclusion from livestock grazing and areas in need of resource improvement can be addressed in grazing alternatives.

Alternative 2 - Current Management

Management Parameter	Allotment			
	<i>Bald Hill</i>	<i>Copper Canyon</i>	<i>Squaw Peak</i>	<i>Young</i>
<i>Permitted Stocking (animal months)</i>	Up to 2064	960 - 1200	Up to 1080	Up to 108
<i>Season of Use</i>	yearlong	yearlong	yearlong	yearlong
<i>Number of Pastures / Grazing System</i>	4 / Deferred (Arnold Pasture winter-use)	4) / deferred (Tompkins Pasture winter-use)	Allotment as a whole – 3 grazing areas / deferment of areas by herding	Allotment as a whole / Deferred
<i>Allowable Use (indicator for pasture moves)</i>	40%	40%	Allotment is managed as a whole – no pastures	Allotment is managed as a whole – no pastures.
<i>Forage Utilization (end of growing season)</i>	50%	50%	50%	40%
<i>Browse Utilization</i>	50% current year's production on available leaders	50% current year's production on available leaders	50% current year's production on available leaders	No browse available
<i>Riparian Area Use</i>	20% current year's growth	20% current year's growth	20% current year's growth	No riparian areas
<i>Range Structural Improvements and Vegetation Treatments</i>	None	None	None	None

This alternative does not wholly address the public issues as allowable use/utilization levels and associated impacts are considered too high by some publics. While Riparian vegetation and habitat quality in Bald Hill and Copper Canyon would be expected to improve with winter only livestock grazing in the Arnold and Tompkins Pastures there is no adaptive management strategy proposed, should improvement not occur. On Squaw Peak, as a result of dry conditions, livestock have concentrated around available water and herding them away has been relatively unsuccessful. As a result utilization has often been exceeded and VGC has decreased.

This alternative fails to wholly meet the Purpose and Need. While the alternative does make forage available for livestock VGC and perennial grass composition would remain static or below attainable potential due to dense juniper or prickly pear cover. Soil conditions would remain variable, degraded areas would continue to decline, and watershed condition would remain static.



Alternative 3 – Proposed Action

Management Parameter	Allotment			
	<i>Bald Hill</i>	<i>Copper Canyon</i>	<i>Squaw Peak</i>	<i>Young</i>
<i>Permitted Stocking (animal months)</i>	1560 - 2064	960 - 1200	Up to 720	Up to 108
<i>Season of Use</i>	yearlong	yearlong	yearlong	yearlong
<i>Number of Pastures / Grazing System</i>	4 / Deferred (Arnold Pasture winter-use)	4 / Deferred (Tompkins Pasture winter-use)	Allotment as a whole – 3 grazing areas / deferment of areas by control of water access	Allotment as a whole / Deferred from grazing the same growing season more than 2 years in a row
<i>Allowable Use (indicator for pasture moves)</i>	40%	40%	30% - Allotment would be managed with 3 grazing areas.	Allotment would be managed as a whole – no pastures.
<i>Forage Utilization (end of growing season)</i>	50%	50%	50%	40%
<i>Browse Utilization</i>	50% current year's production on available leaders	50% current year's production on available leaders	50% current year's production on available leaders	No browse available
<i>Riparian Area Use</i>	20% current year's growth	20% current year's growth	20% current year's growth	No riparian areas
<i>Range Structural Improvements and Vegetation Treatments</i>	Extend riparian enclosure on Cienega Creek, and at Remer Spring; Conduct 2560 acres of juniper removal for watershed improvement; ¾ mile of fence	No new range structures; Conduct 147 acres of juniper control for watershed improvement; Conduct 909 acres of prescribed burning to enhance VGC	No new range structures; Conduct 1061 acres of juniper control for watershed improvement	None

This alternative does not wholly address the public issues since allowable use/utilization levels and associated impacts are the same as Alternative 2 which are deemed too high by some publics. Riparian vegetation and habitat quality would improve because of fencing and the use of winter only pastures but remaining un-fenced areas with riparian vegetation potential would not develop to potential. On Squaw Peak Allotment necessary deferment in the lower elevations would not be assured since water would remain available in accessible drinking troughs for an extended period of time.

The alternative fails to wholly meet Purpose and Need. VGC and grass composition would improve (especially in juniper treatment areas), however grazing intensity would not be reduced enough to move toward attainable potential in identified pastures of Bald Hill and Copper Canyon Allotments (Bates and Bull, Cottonwood).

The alternative does not have the needed flexibility to adapt to changing management needs. For the Young Allotment there is no difference between this alternative and Alternative 4.

Alternative 5 – Reduced Utilization

Management Parameter	Allotment			
	<i>Bald Hill</i>	<i>Copper Canyon</i>	<i>Squaw Peak</i>	<i>Young</i>
<i>Permitted Stocking (animal months)</i>	1170- 1548	720 - 900	540 - 720	Up to 108
<i>Season of Use</i>	yearlong	yearlong	yearlong	yearlong
<i>Number of Pastures / Grazing System</i>	4 / Deferred (Arnold Pasture winter-use)	4 / deferred (Tompkins Pasture winter-use)	Allotment as a whole – 3 grazing areas / deferment of areas by control of access to water and herding	Allotment as a whole / Deferred from grazing the same growing season more than 2 years in a row
<i>Allowable Use (indicator for pasture moves)</i>	30%	30%	25% - Allotment would be managed with 3 grazing areas.	Allotment would be managed as a whole – no pastures.
<i>Forage Utilization (end of growing season)</i>	30%	30%	25%	30%
<i>Browse Utilization</i>	30% current year's production on available leaders	30% current year's production on available leaders	25% current year's production on available leaders	No browse available
<i>Riparian Area Use</i>	Riparian areas fenced	20% current year's growth	No riparian areas grazed	No riparian areas
<i>Range Structural Improvements and Vegetation Treatments</i>	Extend riparian enclosure on Cienega Creek, and at Remer Spring; Construct riparian enclosures adjacent to the private land on Cienega Creek and along Arnold Canyon; ¾ mile of fence.	No new range structures; Conduct 550 acres of prescribed burning to enhance VGC	Construct waterlots at ends of North and Lower Mine Spring pipelines.	None

On the Bald Hill, Copper Canyon, and Young Allotments, this alternative lowers the allowable use/utilization level to a uniform amount over the entire allotment, thus, lower allowable use/utilization would be applied in areas currently meeting resource objectives. This means that the stocking levels are unnecessarily reduced and the option of adjusting allowable use to address needs identified through monitoring is not available. The alternative does not have the needed flexibility to adapt to changing management needs.

For the Squaw Peak Allotment there is no difference between this Alternative and Alternative 4.

#### Alternative Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Seasonal Grazing – This alternative would reduce the current year-round grazing to a September through March season each year for all allotments in the project and would restrict entry into any pasture until such time as the key forage species have re-grown to pre-entry height.

While this alternative addresses resource concerns, it is not feasible to implement due to the lack of management flexibility and adverse economics.

- The defined season lacks management flexibility to adjust operations to meet resource needs.
- The permittees involved do not have a sufficient private land base to which they could move permitted cattle numbers from the Forest for the prescribed 5 months.
- The steer market is so highly volatile that without access to feedlots, the strict off dates would make it impossible to adjust selling at reasonable prices.

## **Public Involvement**

### Scoping

This project has been listed in the Prescott National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since October 1998 through to the most recent release.

Initial scoping of affected grazing permit holders was initiated in August 1997 in preparation for annual permittee meetings that were scheduled and held during October – March 1997-1998. Scoping of internal resource specialists began under letter of October 19, 1998 establishing an interdisciplinary team and continued with the development of a project cover sheet in August 2001 (PR# 18). This scoping process was used to define the size and dimension of the proposal, determine the complexity of the analysis and to identify management concerns. The timeline for completion was extended to better analyze the effects of the ongoing drought, and to determine an attainable herbaceous potential for these allotments.

Information on existing conditions was collected and was used by the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) to develop a proposed action for each allotment utilizing the field data and permittee input garnered from annual grazing validation meetings and field monitoring meetings. The ID Team developed a proposed action for each allotment utilizing field data and permittee input garnered from annual grazing validation meetings and field monitoring meetings. The proposed actions were combined into a single proposed action for the entire project area and sent out to 41 individuals, organizations, State and Federal agencies, and affected permittees for review and comment in January 2002 (PR# 32, 33). Three individuals, three organizations, one State and one Federal agency responded. No affected permit holders formally responded.

The ID Team reviewed all the letters received and prepared a "response to comments" document along with an outline of alternatives (PR# 61, 62). These documents were sent out to the respondents and affected permit holders in September 2002 (PR# 63, 64). The affected permit holders were not among the few who responded to this document, either.

Permittees, however, have chosen to be informally involved in the analysis through the annual grazing validation meetings and field monitoring meetings rather than utilizing the more formal process.

In late June 2004, a request for comments package was sent to the 8 scoping respondents, the 4 affected permit holders, and interested Native American tribes (PR# 79, 81). Ten comment letters were received (PR#s 83 - 92). The ID Team reviewed and considered the comments in early August 2004 (PR# 93, 94). Comments were used to complete Chapter 3 of the EA (PR#98).

As the result of having subsequent decisions reversed by the Forest Supervisor a second comment period was conducted in March 2005. The comment package was sent to 15 interested parties and agencies including the 4 affected permit holders (PR# 111). Addendum letters informing the potentially interested Tribes of the changes made to the original June 2004 comment package were also sent (PR# 112). Six comment letters were received (PR# 120 – 124, 128). The Acting District Ranger, Acting Forest Range - Soil/Water - Ecology Team Leader, Forest NEPA Coordinator, and the project ID Team Leader reviewed and considered the comments in early May 2005. Comments were used to complete Chapter 3 and make editing changes to the other parts of the assessment (PR# 125).

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

Context: The setting of this proposed action is local in regards to the long and short-term effects on both human and natural resources. The effects of this project are limited to a small portion of rural Yavapai County, Arizona.

Intensity:

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making this determination of significance. The project has beneficial effects because VGC and perennial grass composition will improve towards attainable potential where not limited by juniper density. Soil condition is expected to improve in the Bates and Bull Pastures (Bald Hill Allotment), the Cottonwood Pasture (Copper Canyon Allotment) and throughout the Squaw Peak Allotment due to lower allowable use/utilization levels (EA pg 3-6). Riparian vegetation, and habitat quality in areas exhibiting a high potential to develop such vegetation will be maintained or improved (EA Table 2.6; Chapter 3). Channel profiles will return to appropriate dimensions for site morphology and channel functions. Watershed health will be maintained (EA Chapter 3) and lower utilization, lower stocking, and waterlot construction will greatly improve the ability to apply grazing deferment on the Squaw Peak Allotment.

Adverse effects are minimal and localized. This action does not rely on beneficial effects to balance potential adverse environmental effects (EA Chapter 3).

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. Public health and safety are not identified as a public issue (EA page 1-9, PR# 61) nor identified in public comments (PR# 98, 125)
3. There are two areas having unique characteristics in the project area. These are a small section of the Verde Scenic River and a portion of the Cedar Bench Wilderness.  

There will be no effects from this project to the scenic river segment because livestock grazing is wholly excluded and grazing on the uplands will not lead to cumulative adverse effects to riparian, channel, or watershed conditions that would impair the river's scenic values (PR# 106,116, EA Chapter 3).

There will be no effects to the wilderness values in the Cedar Bench Wilderness because livestock use is dispersed and both human and livestock access is limited minimizing human – livestock interactions. This wilderness is hard to get to by both livestock and people and consequentially is not overused by either. The wilderness character is mostly present and with not a lot of human influence in the area there are opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive, unconfined type of recreation (PR #115, EA Chapter 3).

No significant historic resources will be impacted (PR# 129). There are no prime farmlands in the project area (EA Chapter 3). There will be no significant adverse impacts to minority groups, civil rights, women, consumers or environmental justice (EA Chapter 3).
4. The effects of livestock grazing on the quality of the human environment may be controversial to some, but the controversy is neither of great intensity nor on a widespread scale. The permittees and public were involved during the analysis (EA Chapter 1 and 2, PR # 12, 22, 25, 32, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 41, 46 – 69, 79, 83 – 93, 111, 119 – 125, 128). While some people have disagreed with portions of the project, no one has provided evidence that the effects of the project have been wrongly predicted.
5. The overall effects of the decision are not considered to be highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or unknown risks because practices evaluated are standard grazing activities within the historic level of management activity for the area and we have considerable experience with the type of actions to be implemented (Chapter 1, PR# 126).
6. The grazing activities to be implemented will not establish a precedent for future actions nor do they represent a decision in principle. The activities implemented under this decision are not a major departure from types of activities common to the Prescott NF and are within the historic level of management for the area. This decision is within guidelines established by the Forest Plan for grazing activities (PR#1, PR # 135) and does not commit me to actions on lands outside the project area (EA Chapter 1).
7. Cumulative effects of past, present, and foreseeable future activities in the vicinity of the allotment have been considered and evaluated (EA Chapter 3, PR #s 106, 114, 115, 116, 129, 131). These effects do not substantially add to those described for the selected alternative. With the exception of routine maintenance activities, all known connected actions associated with the selected activities likely to occur in the future have been identified in the assessment, with the direct, indirect and cumulative effects disclosed in the EA (EA Chapter 3). The cumulative impacts are not significant (EA Chapter 3).
8. The action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because cultural

surveys have been conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties on areas of the project (PR#129) and the Forest Archaeologist has determined that there will be no effect to heritage resources (PR#129). As per the Memorandum Of Understanding with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) this determination constitutes concurrence by the SHPO.

9. The action will not adversely affect any listed (Endangered Species Act 1973) endangered or threatened species or any critical or proposed critical habitat.

**Federally Listed Plants and Animals on the Prescott National Forest and the Effect on the species from this project**

Scientific Name Common Name	Status	Effect Summary
<b>Birds</b>		
<i>Empidonax traillimus eximus</i> Southwestern willow fly catcher	Endangered	No direct or measurable indirect effect (species does not occur in project area). No cumulative effects.
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> Bald eagle	Threatened	No effect (species and habitat does not occur in the project area)
<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i> Mexican spotted owl	Threatened	No effect (species and habitat does not occur in the project area)
<b>Fish</b>		
<i>Poeciliopsis o. occidentalis</i> Gila topminnow	Endangered	No effect (species and habitat not present in project area)
<i>Xyrauchen texanus</i> Razorback sucker	Endangered	No effect (species and habitat not present in project area)
<i>Meda fulgida</i> Spikedace	Threatened	No effect (species and habitat not present in project area)
<i>Tiaroga cobitis</i> Loach Minnow	Threatened	No effect (species and habitat not present in project area)
<i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i> Colorado pikeminnow	Threatened (Experimental, non-essential)	No effect (species and habitat not present in project area)
<i>Gila intermedia</i> Gila chub	Endangered	No effect (species and habitat not present in project)
<i>Xyrauchen texanu</i> Razorback sucker	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	No effect (designated critical habitat is not present in the project area)
<b>Plants</b>		
None	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	No effect since no listed plants are present on the PNF)

This is documented in the wildlife, fish, and rare plant specialist report (PR# 131) and EA Chapter 3.

10. This project is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws

## **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

This decision to implement Alternative 4 for management of livestock grazing on the Verde Rim Livestock Grazing Project (Bald Hill, Copper Canyon, Squaw Peak, and Young Allotments) is consistent with the following laws:

Clean Air Act of 1970 (as amended) - This Act is to prevent deterioration of air quality. All activities including prescribed burning will be implemented in accordance with provisions of the Clean Air Act as administered by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (PR# 118).

Clean Water Act of 1977 (as amended) - This Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this Act through the use of BMPs. This decision incorporates BMPs to improve or protect the soil and water resources (DN pg 5; EA Chapter 2; Appendix 1).

Endangered Species Act (1973) – This decision will not jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered, threatened, or proposed species or adversely modify existing or proposed critical habitat for any species (FONSI, EA Chapter 3; Appendix 2; PR#131)

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898) - This Order requires consideration of whether projects will disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. This decision complies with this Order. Public involvement occurred for this project, the results of which I have considered in this decision-making. Public involvement did not identify any adversely impacted local minority or low-income populations (EA page 3-31). Therefore, this decision is not expected to disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 – Under this act permits, leases, and easements are granted for occupancy, use, or crossing of NFS lands when the need for such is consistent with planned uses and Forest Service policy and regulations. This decision is consistent with this Act in that new permits outlining appropriate use will be issued (DN pgs 2, 3; EA Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need; Chapter 2 -Table 2.6).

Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (an amendment to FLPMA) – This Act requires permittee involvement in the planning process. This decision is consistent with this Act in that permittee involvement was solicited and received (EA Chapter 1, PR# 86 [comment letter from Y-A Nation attorney General]).

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) - This Act requires the development and implementation of long-range land and resource management plans (Forest Plans). The Prescott Forest Plan was approved on August 4, 1987, as required by this Act. This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan's goals and objectives as they relate to the project scope (EA Table 2.6 and PR# 135).

Floodplains Management (Executive Order 11988) – This Executive Order is to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. The only floodplains subject to this order are in the Verde River Valley (Forest Plan FEIS, p. 102). This decision will not impact the functional value of these floodplains since the project does not involve activities within Verde River floodplains and proposed activities in the area adjacent and upland from the floodplain will not contribute to any impacts (EA Chapter 3; PR# 106).

Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 - This act directs management to utilize all the various renewable surface resources of National Forest in a harmonious and coordinated combination that will not impair the productivity of the land. This act was complied with when the Forest Plan allocated resources (PR#1 pg 1). I have determined that the activities and mitigation measures

of Alternative 4 are in compliance with the provision of this Act because the alternative is consistent with the Prescott Forest Plan (PR#135).

National Environmental Policy Act (as amended) – This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this Act (PR; EA; DN).

Laws Governing Heritage Resources:

National Historic Preservation Act - Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register.

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through “in situ” preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items.

This decision complies with the cited Acts. Interested tribes were afforded the opportunity to comment and consult on the project (PR# 81, 112). Several Tribes responded (PR# 85, 86, 90, 91, 92). Surveys have been conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties on areas of the project (PR#129). The Forest Archaeologist has determined that there will be no effect to heritage resources (PR#129). Prior to any adaptive range improvement activity the Forest Archeologist will be consulted and any needed surveys or mitigation measures will be implemented so that there will be no effect to heritage resources (EA Chapter 3).

Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670) - This Manual direction requires analysis of potential impacts to sensitive species, those species for which population viability is a concern. Potential effects of this decision on sensitive species have been analyzed and documented. This decision will have no adverse impact on sensitive species (EA Chapter 3; PR# 131, 132).

Wetlands (Executive Order 11990) – This Executive Order is to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. This decision will not adversely affect wetlands as fencing and winter grazing adjustments exclude or control grazing the wetlands within the project area (EA Chapter 3, PR#106).

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (as amended) - This project will have no adverse effects to any Wild and Scenic River as the only portion potentially affected by the project is in a scenic section of the Verde River devoted to developed day use/river access and is fully excluded from grazing (PR#116).

## **Implementation Dates**

If no appeals are filed, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day from the close of the appeal filing period established in the notice of decision legal advertisement posted in the Prescott Arizona *Daily Courier*. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the disposition of the last appeal.



## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) by written notice pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Holders of livestock grazing permits may appeal this decision under 36 CFR 215 or 251 but not both. A written notice of appeal must be filed within 45 days, with the appeal period beginning the day after the day of publication of the Legal Notice in the Prescott Daily Courier. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer. Written appeals must be submitted to:

**Appeal Deciding Officer**  
344 S. Cortez Street  
Prescott, Arizona 86303

Appeals may be faxed to the Appeal Deciding Officer at 928-443-8008. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to [appeals-southwestern-prescott@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-southwestern-prescott@fs.fed.us). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals. Please put the project name in the "subject" line.

For those appealing under 36 CFR 215, In accordance with 36 CFR 215.14, the appeal must include:

1. The regulation under which the appeal is being filed;
2. Appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
3. The name of the project for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
4. Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes or identification of the portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees and explanation for the disagreement;
5. Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments;
6. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy;
7. Signature or other verification of authorship (When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant).

For those appealing under 36 CFR 251, in accordance with 36 CFR 251.90, the appeal must include:

- A) The regulation under which the appeal is being filed;
- B) Appellant's name, mailing address, and daytime telephone number;
- C) The title or type of permit involved, the date of application or issuance of the permit involved, and the name of the responsible Forest Officer issuing the permit involved;
- D) A brief description and date of the written decision being appealed;
- E) A statement of how the appellant is adversely affected by the decision being appealed;

- F) A statement as to whether and how the appellant has tried to resolve the issue(s) being appealed with the Deciding Officer, the date(s) of any meetings or contacts and the outcomes of those meetings or contacts;
- G) Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes or identification of the portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees and explanation for the disagreement.

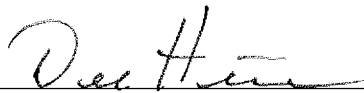
## Contact

For further information concerning the decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact,

Craig Steedman  
Verde Ranger District  
P. O. Box 670  
Camp Verde, AZ 86322  
Telephone: 928-567-4121

## Deciding Official

The Deciding Official is the District Ranger, Verde Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest



May 2, 2006

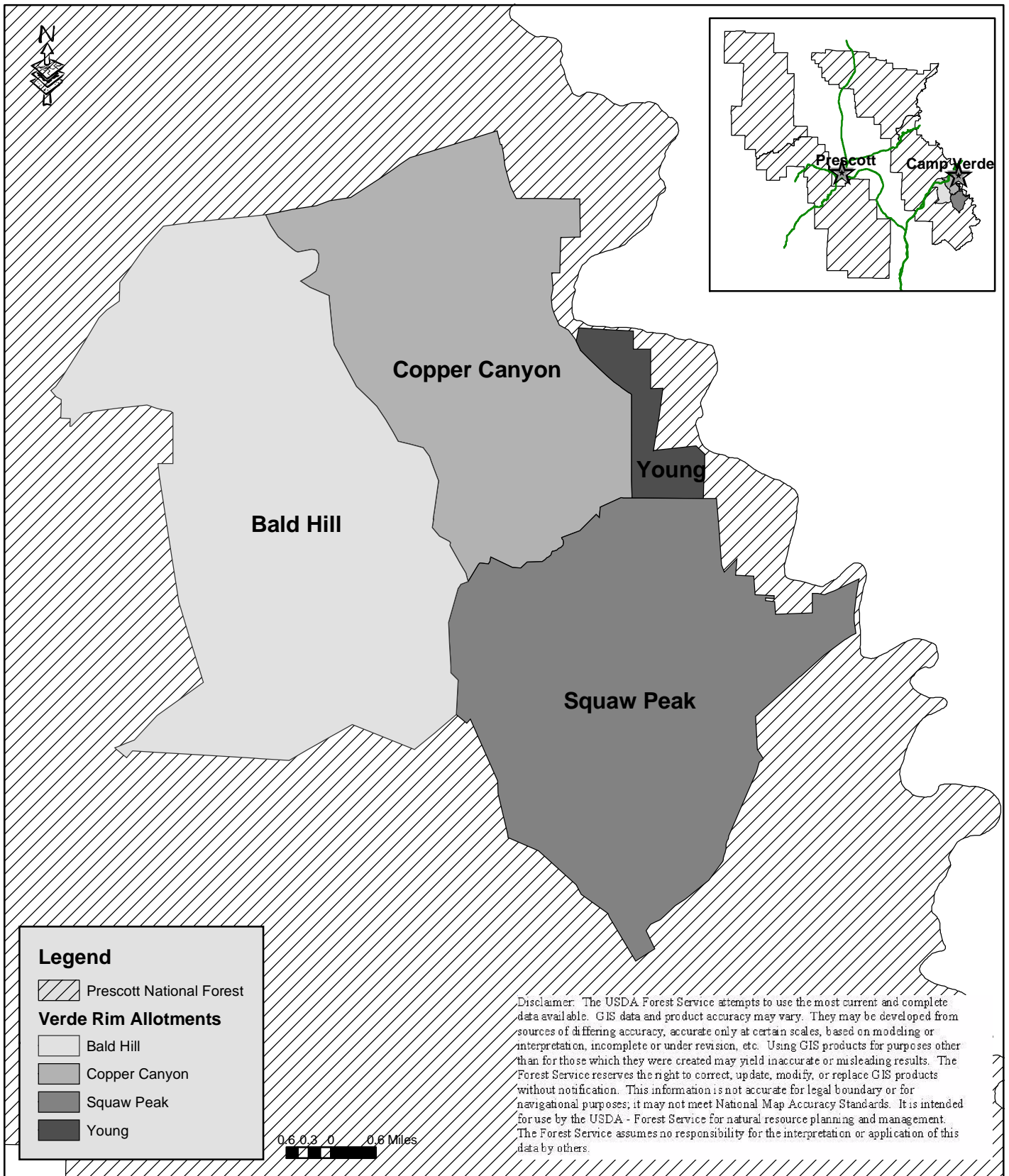
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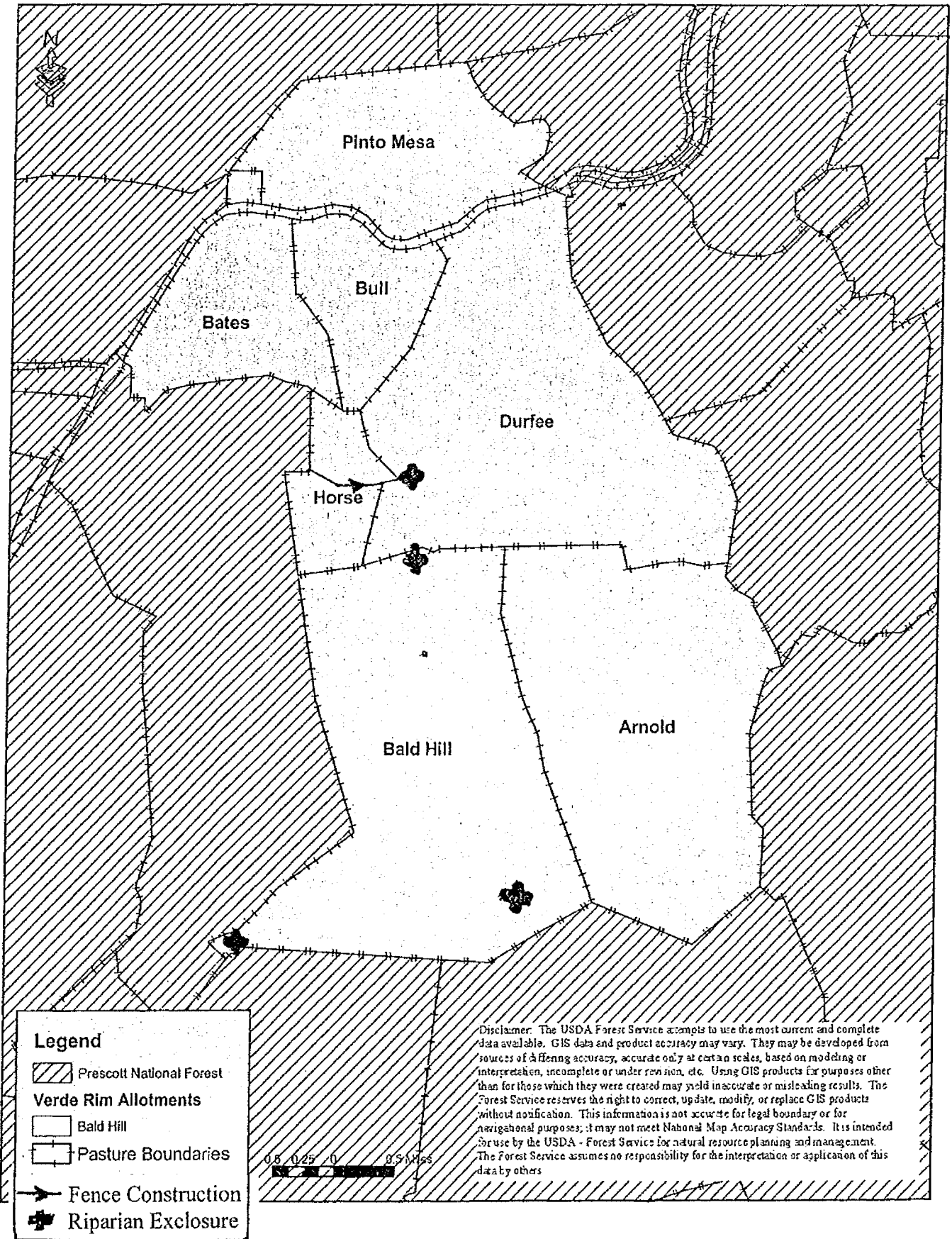
Verde District Ranger

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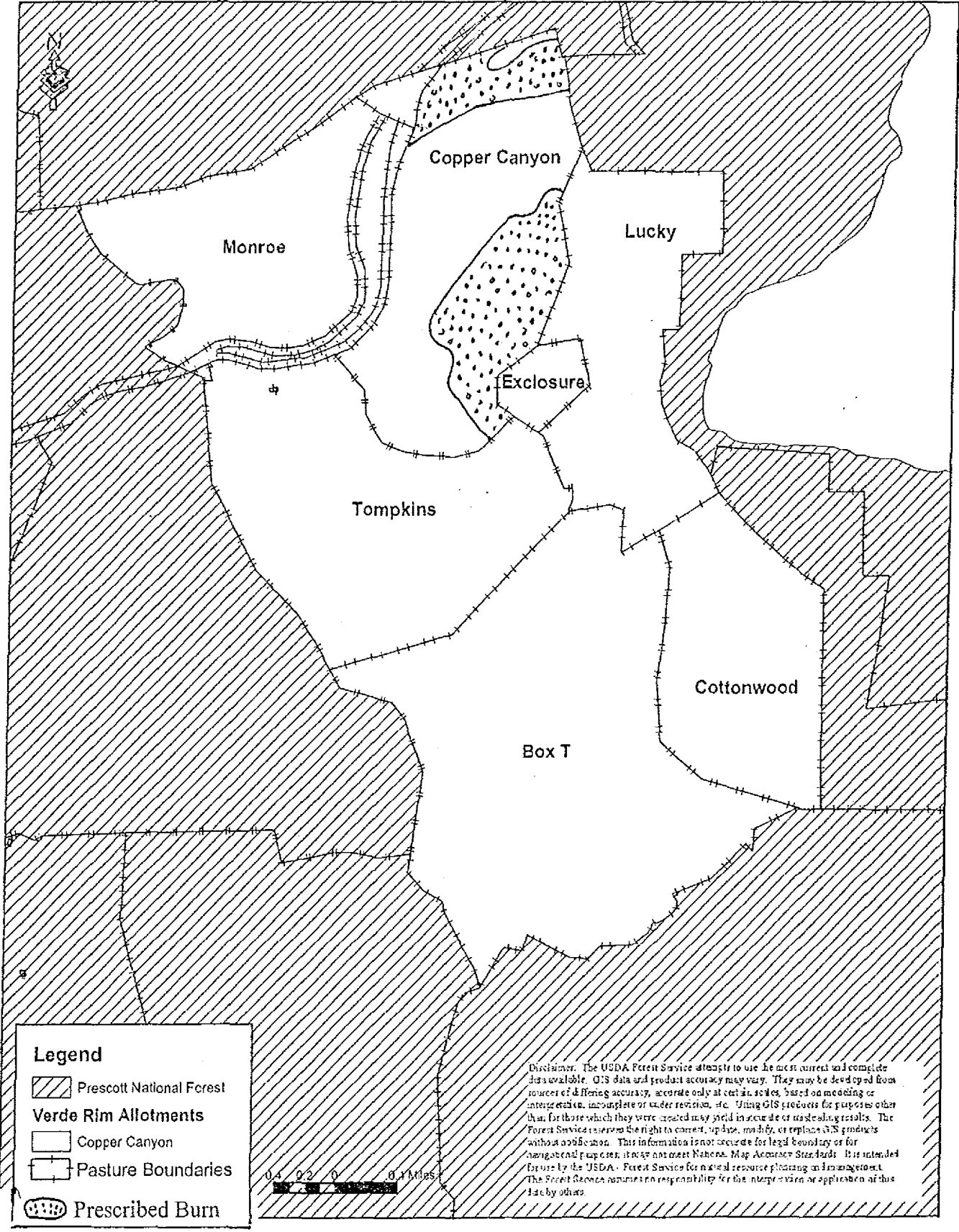
# Verde Rim Grazing Allotments







# Bald Hill Allotment

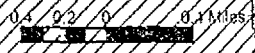


# Copper Canyon Allotment



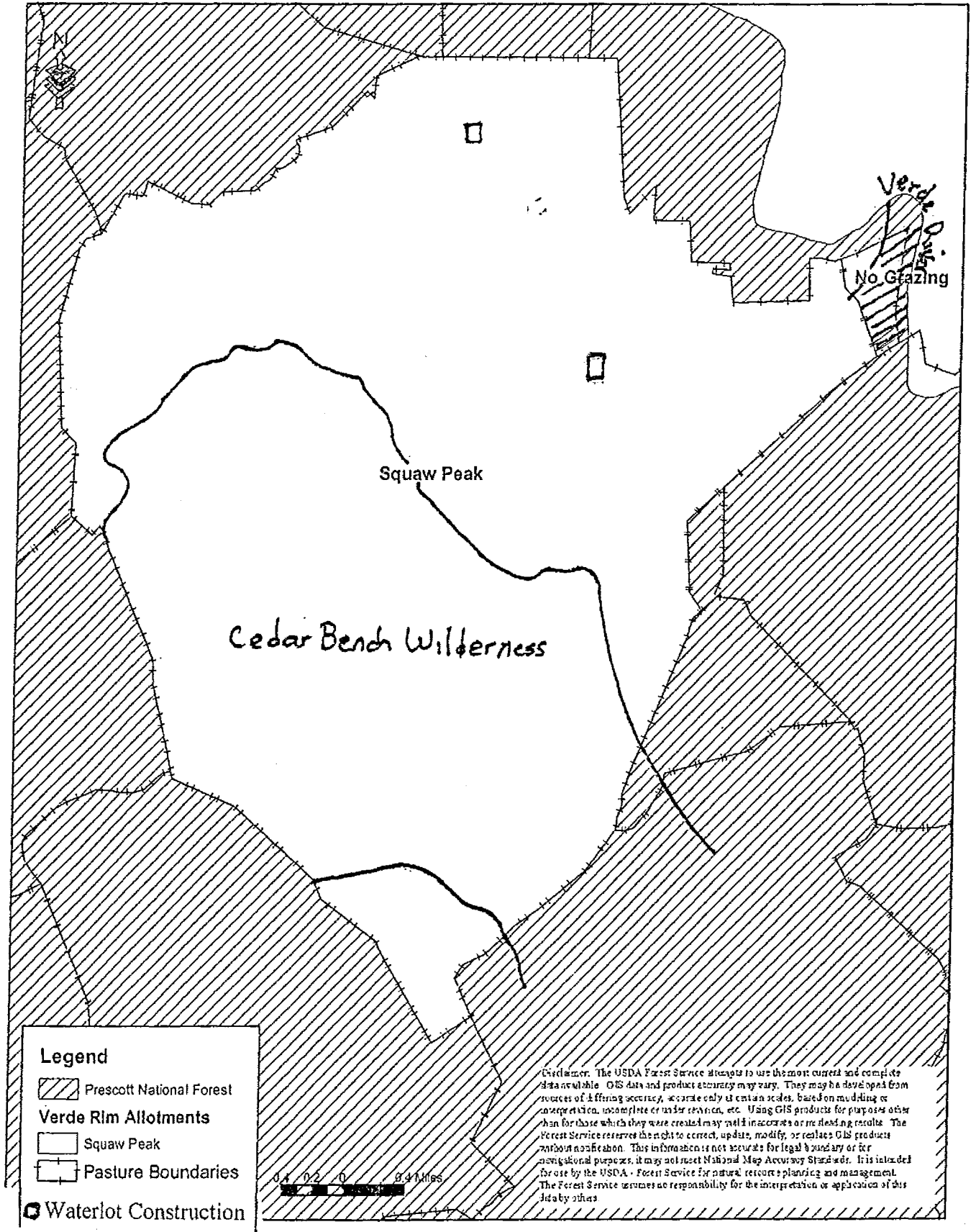
**Legend**

-  Prescott National Forest
- Verde Rim Allotments**
-  Copper Canyon
-  Pasture Boundaries
-  Prescribed Burn



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# Squaw Peak Allotment



## Legend

Prescott National Forest

## Verde Rim Allotments

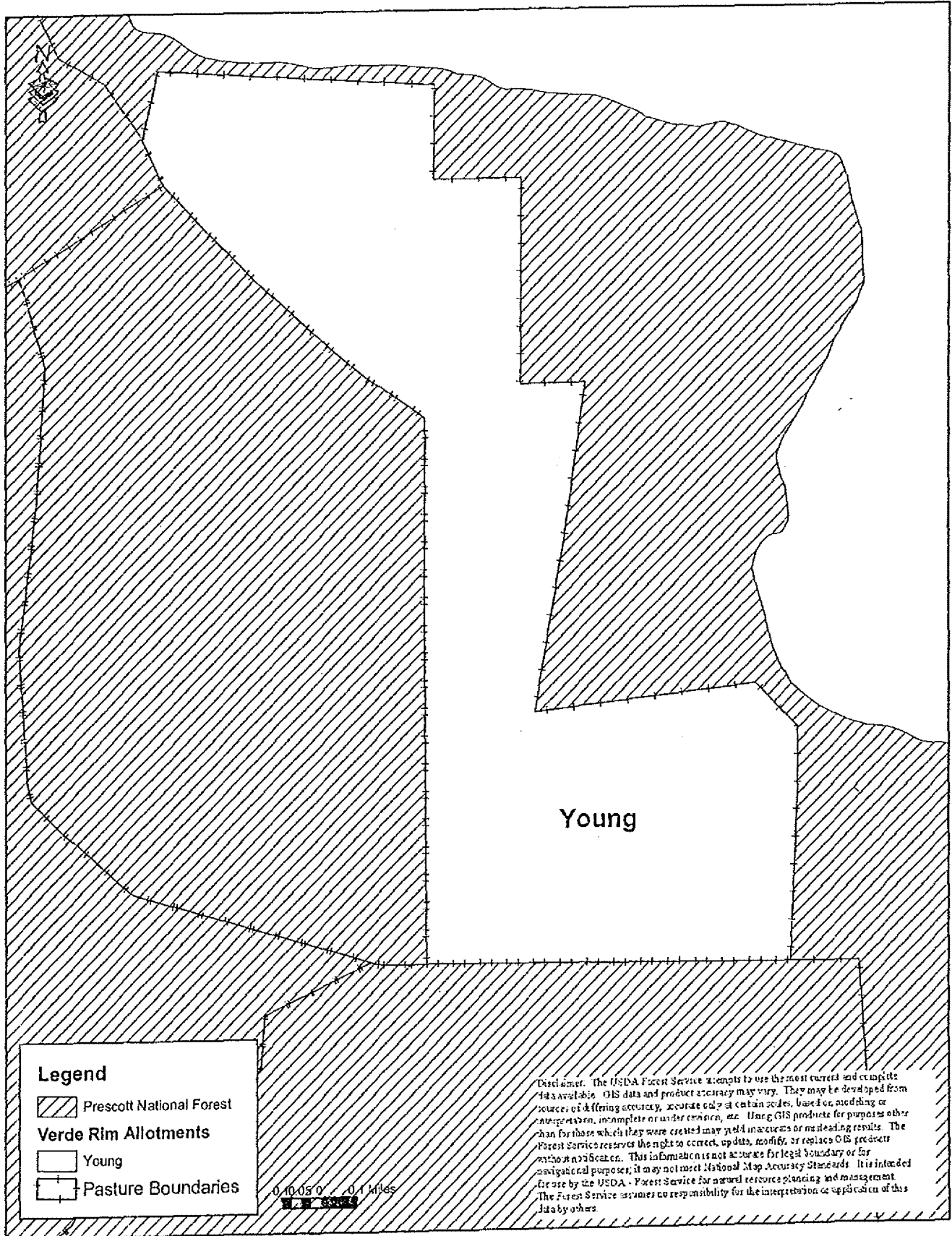
Squaw Peak

Pasture Boundaries




Waterlot Construction

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# Young Allotment



## Legend

-  Prescott National Forest
- Verde Rim Allotments**
-  Young
-  Pasture Boundaries

0 0.05 0.1 0.15 miles

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## Squaw Peak 100 acres of Juniper Thinning Project

Squaw Peak Tank is shared by Bald Hill and Squaw Peak allotments and is an important source of water for wildlife, particularly elk. The watershed immediately around the tank is TES 461, a juniper map unit that has high canopy cover and a low threshold for grasses and forbs and produces a lot of sediment into the catchment. Thinning these junipers to increase ground cover would increase the reliability of water for storage.

This project is located T13N R 4E section 36. It is difficult for the permittee to hold his cattle long enough in the higher elevation to achieve deferment in the lower grazing areas. Monitoring (2009) in the low country noted that there was little regrowth on grasses and that utilization levels had been exceeded and livestock need to be moved to the upper elevations of the allotment. This allotment has only one pasture so it is difficult to manage the livestock. The allotment is managed as three grazing areas, one at higher elevations and two at lower elevations, since topography does not allow for cross fencing. Deferment of grazing areas will be accomplished by control of water access and herding. This project is very important helping move cattle between grazing areas, by providing the opportunity to hold more water in Squaw Peak tank.

Kelli Spleiss

Rangeland Management Specialist

3/31/2010