



**DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
WAGONER GRAZING ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
BRADSHAW RANGER DISTRICT, PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST
YAVAPAI COUNTY, ARIZONA**

DECISION NOTICE

Based upon my review of the Wagoner Grazing Allotment Management Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, which includes the following elements and resource protection measures:

Summary of specific components of Alternative 1, Wagoner Allotment

Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas of Satisfactory Condition	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas Needing Improvement
<p>A term grazing permit will be issued providing for livestock use not to exceed 1,872 Animal Unit Months¹ (AUMs) yearlong. As an example, this would allow for grazing by up to 156 head of adult cattle, or cow/calf pairs and bulls, on a yearlong basis or a higher number of livestock when calculated on a less than yearlong basis.</p> <p>Livestock will be managed using a rotational grazing system incorporating growing season rest or deferment to promote forage plant recovery following grazing.</p>	<p>A management guideline of 35-45% forage utilization of key forage plants in upland key areas as measured at the end of the growing season.</p> <p>Up to 50-60% browse use on key upland woody species;</p> <p>Minimum stubble height on key riparian herbaceous species - four to six inches where sedges and rushes are key species, eight inches where deergrass is key species.</p> <p>Up to 20% use by weight on key woody species within riparian areas; or less than 50% of terminal leaders browsed on woody vegetation less than 6 feet tall.</p>	<p>Areas identified needing improvement: Bain Pasture, key soil map unit TEUI 370; Cellar Basin, Big Pasture and Horse Pasture, key soil map unit TEUI 363; Knight & South Paxton Pastures, key soil map unit TEUI 363; Southwestern Paxton Unit, key soil map unit TEUI 360:</p> <p>A management guideline of up to 30% forage utilization of key forage plants in upland key areas as measured at the end of the growing season.</p>

Other Site-specific Resource Protection Measures

In addition to the site-specific grazing intensity guidelines to be applied in areas of resource concerns in the uplands, the following riparian area management objectives will also apply:

¹ An AUM is defined as the average forage consumed by one cow/calf pair over a period of one month.

Bain Pasture, Blind Indian Creek Management Objectives: For the intermittent flow reaches assessed as Functional-At Risk move at least 50 percent to Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) within 10 years. Maintain and/or achieve and maintain canopy cover of obligate woody species to near potential (45% TEUI 30.1)

Big Pasture, Blind Indian Creek Management Objectives: In the portions with strong intermittent flow, e.g., Ross Spring to Berry Spring reach, obtain key obligate and facultative herbaceous vegetation along the greenline where not rock armored or bank fully protected with roots of woody vegetation and maintain existing herbaceous vegetation.

Paxton Pasture, Minnehaha Creek Management Objectives: In the portions with long season intermittent flow within TEUI 41 (e.g., below Minnehaha Spring) obtain key obligate and facultative herbaceous vegetation along the greenline where not rock armored or bank fully protected with roots of woody vegetation and maintain existing herbaceous vegetation. Maintain and/or achieve and maintain obligate woody vegetative canopy in the near floodplain at or near its potential (65% TEUI 41).

Paxton Pasture, Cherry Creek Management Objectives: Take advantage of opportunities to increase riparian woody vegetation along stream edge. Move toward obligate canopy cover potential of 45% (TEUI 30.1).

Riparian Grazing Management: Manage timing, intensity, and duration of use to allow obligate and key facultative herbaceous vegetation to become established along the greenline of intermittent reaches and maintain those reaches already established. Apply the allotment wide stubble height guidelines. Manage use to allow periodically germinated obligate woody species to move from seedling to sapling stage within regime of water availability.

In the event that the above resource protection measures do not accomplish site-specific resource objectives, additional optional measures may be implemented. These optional measures will be designed to address site-specific resource concerns and may include, but are not limited to, such things as temporary fencing, electric fencing, reconstruction of non-functional improvements, and construction of new improvements such as drift fences.

Range Structural Improvements

The proposed action includes construction of the following new structural improvements that have been developed to address resource concerns and are intended to aid in the achievement or maintenance of desired resource conditions by improving livestock distribution. Upland water developments will provide livestock water away from riparian areas and allow for achievement of riparian management objectives. Monitoring may indicate that some of these improvements are not necessary; however, if some or all of these improvements are not implemented, the upper limit of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable on a sustained basis.

1. Big Pasture: Construction of a water development north of Ross Spring; development of Purebred Spring.

2. Horse Pasture: Construction of two new water developments: one north and one south of Steamboat Spring; placement of two troughs from pipelines in southwest pasture; construction of drift fence to divide pasture.
3. Cherry Pasture: Construction of three water developments, one is shared with Paxton and Horse Pastures.
4. Paxton Pasture: Construction of three water developments: one shared with Knight Pasture, one shared with Cherry and Horse Pastures, and one on the McCallister Range.
5. Knight Pasture: Construction of one water development (shared with Paxton Pasture) and fence along forest boundary

Gully Stabilization

Gully stabilization would occur at Indian Springs and in the Knight Pasture. Practices would be designed to minimize further gully expansion, alleviate further dewatering of the soils profile, and promote soil stabilization as a means to decrease sedimentation. The following soil conservation practices may be implemented for gully stabilization.

- Ripping and/or scarifying soils
- Re-contouring the landscape associated with gullies
- Contour furrowing or pitting the landscape influencing the gullies
- Seeding, mulching, water bars, installing wattles, micorrhizae inoculation, and/or fertilization.
- Constructing erosion control structures, check dams, revetments, and or water spreaders using materials such as gabions, rocks/boulders, wattles, silt fence, wire mesh fence material, erosion blanket, concrete, rebar, etc.
- Incidental trees, shrubs, or other vegetation may be removed in order to accomplish the preceding stabilization activities.

Details 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 may suggest the 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 in cooperation with the permittee. Modifications may 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/or 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, 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.

Authorization

The Bradshaw District Ranger proposes to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the Wagoner Allotment under the following terms:

- A term grazing permit will be issued providing for livestock use not to exceed 1,872 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) yearlong. As an example, this would allow for grazing by up to 156 head of adult cattle, or cow/calf pairs and bulls, on a yearlong basis or a higher number of livestock when calculated on a less than yearlong basis.
- Livestock will be managed using a rotational grazing system incorporating growing season rest or deferment to promote forage plant recovery following grazing. Grazing deferment allows for pastures to be rested for all or a portion of a growing season by not using the pasture for the same period from year to year.

The term grazing permit 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.

Range Improvements

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 needed as conditions warrant.

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 (AMP) will be included in the Annual Operating Instructions (AOI) , 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

Three types of monitoring will be used - implementation monitoring, periodic monitoring of short-term indicators of resource conditions, and effectiveness monitoring.

Implementation Monitoring: This monitoring will be conducted on an annual basis and will include such things as livestock actual use (# of head, # of months) and scheduled and unscheduled inspections to ensure that all livestock and grazing management measures stipulated in permits, AMPs and AOIs are being implemented (e.g. cattle numbers, on/off dates, rotation schedules, maintenance of improvements, mitigation measures).

Periodic Monitoring of Short-term Indicators of Resource Conditions: Short-term indicators of resource conditions such as forage utilization, residual forage, species composition, plant cover, frequency or density, and/or vegetative ground cover will be monitored on the allotment at key areas and at areas identified with site-specific resource concerns. Methods will include generally accepted monitoring protocols.

The purpose of periodic monitoring of short-term indicators is to determine:

1. If individual plants have had an opportunity to recover, grow and reproduce following grazing impacts.
2. If sufficient residual forage remains at the end of the growing season to provide for other resource values or requirements such as soil productivity, wildlife habitat, and dormant season use.
3. If maintenance or improvement of rangeland conditions are indicated.
4. If management adjustments are warranted for the following season to provide for the physiological needs of primary forage species and other resources identified as concerns.
5. If vegetation, soils, and riparian areas are maintaining or moving toward desired conditions.

Effectiveness Monitoring: Monitoring, according to a Monitoring Plan to be established in the Allotment Management Plan, to evaluate the success of management in achieving the desired objectives will occur within key areas or on permanent transects at an interval of 10 years or less. Initial baseline information has been collected on this allotment. Effectiveness monitoring may also occur if data and observations from monitoring of short-term indicators suggest a need for additional information.

Decision Rationale

I have selected Alternative 1 because it best meets the purpose and need for action described in the EA (project record² document #59) while addressing the multiple use resource needs of the Agency as expressed in the desired conditions and Forest Plan direction (pages 4-7 of the EA). 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 effects of implementing Alternative 1 have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA for Vegetation; Soils; Watershed and Water Resources; Wildlife, Aquatic Species, and Rare Plants; Recreation; and Heritage (EA pages 23-50). I have reviewed these summary findings in the EA as well as the specialist reports in the project record, and conclude that the design of the alternative and the associated resource protection measures will allow for desired conditions to be met and will be in compliance with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan. Alternative 1 provides grazing opportunities while also allowing for improvement and protection of vegetation, soil, riparian areas, and watershed values. This alternative will move resources towards desired conditions or maintain desired conditions by implementing site-specific grazing intensity guidelines to provide adequate residual ground cover, and by authorizing the construction of range improvements designed to improve livestock distribution and reduce reliance on riparian areas as water sources.

The Wagoner Grazing Allotment Management EA and the project record document the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

Public Involvement

The Wagoner Grazing Allotment Management project has been listed in the Prescott National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since October 2011 at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>. A letter dated April 20, 2012 describing the proposed action was sent to affected permit holders, members of the public, non-profit groups, and other entities that have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to State and Federal governments and to Native

² Further references to project record documents are listed as "PR #"

American Tribes inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The scoping letter resulted in six responses. The content of the scoping responses was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official (PR #47). It was determined that the proposed action as designed with included resource protection measures and following Best Management Practices would serve to address any concerns raised through public scoping. No additional alternatives were developed as a result of public scoping.

The *Environmental Assessment for the Wagoner Grazing Allotment Management* was mailed to scoping respondents and the grazing permittee, and a legal notice announcing the start of the 30-day comment period was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on August 9, 2012. There were two responses received during the 30-day comment period. The content of the comments was reviewed by the ID Team Leader and the Deciding Official (PR #57) 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.

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 Wagoner Allotment is located in the southwestern corner of the Bradshaw Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest (PNF) and represents the project area for this environmental analysis, an area of approximately 30,600 acres. It is located approximately 15 miles southeast of Kirkland Junction, Arizona. Most of the allotment has hilly terrain that is divided by drainages running through moderate to steep divides or canyons. Elevation on the allotment varies from about 3,450 feet at points where Blind Indian Creek and Minnehaha Creek leave the allotment along the west boundary to 7,000 feet at the crest of Horse Mountain in the Bradshaw Range. Average annual precipitation across the allotment varies with elevation and ranges from approximately 16 inches at the lower elevations to 30 inches at the upper elevations.

The main vegetation types on the Wagoner Allotment consist of semi-desert grassland and desert scrub mix, interior chaparral, and pinyon/juniper with chaparral. Riparian areas are found along several major streamcourses including Blind Indian Creek, Cellar Springs Creek, Minnehaha Creek, and Cherry Creek. Fremont cottonwood, willow, and ash are the most common obligate riparian woody species. Herbaceous riparian vegetation is variable in both density and species abundance, but includes sedges, rushes, bulrushes, and deergrass.

The four primary watersheds being evaluated for cumulative effects of past, present, and future activities at the 6th level hydrologic unit code (HUC) are: Blind Indian Creek, Minnehaha Creek, Cherry Creek, and Oak Creek.

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. The Blind Indian Creek Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) is within the allotment, but there are no road-building activities proposed under Alternative 1. There are no wilderness areas on the allotment. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches occurring within the Wagoner Allotment (EA pages 48-49). The allotment is known to contain cultural resources of both prehistoric and historic periods. The Forest Service's proposal to continue livestock management is considered to have a no adverse effect on the heritage properties located within the Wagoner Allotment (EA pages 49-50).

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 Chapter 1 and 4 of the EA (page 8 and 51, respectively), 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 (See EA Chapter 3, pages 23-50).

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 effects of this project are predictable, given that similar actions have occurred in the watershed for many decades. Major follow-up actions will not be necessary. I conclude that this action does not establish precedence for future actions with unknown risks to the environment.

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. Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 23-50) 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 has been completed for grazing and proposed improvements. The SHPO has concurred with the no adverse effect determination, and the Forest Supervisor approved the SHPO clearance on 9/7/2012 (PR #55).

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 habitat within the project area. The Wildlife, Fisheries, and Rare Plants Report and Biological Evaluation for the Wagoner Allotment, finalized on 9/26/2012, document the lack of species or habitat (PR #58).

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 (EA pages 5-7).

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. 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. The EA analyzed a reasonable range of alternatives, including the No Grazing alternative. It also 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 and any potentially affected tribes have been consulted. Clearance for this project has been received, with concurrence by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

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

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to regulations at 36 CFR 215. Individuals or organizations who provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action during the 30-day comment period may appeal. The permittee may appeal this decision under 36 CFR 251. Interest expressed or comments provided on this project prior to or after the close of the comment period do not have standing for appeal purposes. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer. Submit appeals to:

Betty Mathews
Forest Supervisor
Attn: Wagoner Grazing Allotment Management
Prescott National Forest
344 S. Cortez St.
Prescott, AZ 86303-4398
Fax: 928-443-8208

If hand delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours

(Monday - Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm), excluding holidays. Electronic appeals may be submitted to: appeals-southwestern-prescott@fs.fed.us (.doc, .rtf, or .txt formats only). 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.

Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the *Daily Courier*, the newspaper of record. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

Implementation Date

If no appeals 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 appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Christine Thiel, ID Team Leader, Chino Valley Ranger District, (928) 777-2211.

Linda L. Jackson *Sept. 28, 2012*
Linda L. Jackson **Date**
District Ranger

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