



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

**DECISION NOTICE**

Based upon my review of the Walnut Grove 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, Walnut Grove Allotment**

Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas of Satisfactory Condition	Stocking Rate	Range Improvements
Seasonal grazing for up to 182 days between September 1 <sup>st</sup> and April 15 <sup>th</sup> using two pastures (East and West) in a rotational grazing system	Moderate grazing intensity (41-50% use) on key herbaceous species during the dormant season; conservative grazing intensity (31-40% use) from September 1 <sup>st</sup> through 30 <sup>th</sup> , which is within the summer growing season  Upland Browse – 50-60% leaders browsed  Riparian Woody - 20% current growth by weight Riparian Herbaceous – 4-6" minimum stubble height where sedges and rushes are key species and 8" where deergrass is key species	Ranging from 123 to 606 Animal Unit Months <sup>1</sup> (AUMs) for up to 182 days	Reconstruct South and West Trick Tanks; add storage tanks at Deer Spring and Deer Trick Tank; reconstruct Upper Tank; modify the Ross Flat watershed enclosure by adding ½ to 1 mile of new fence; construct a new fence around Ross Spring; reconstruct and maintain existing erosion control structures at Ross Flat.
<b>Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Site-specific Resource Protection Measures for Areas of Concern</b>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Incidental use<sup>2</sup> only, regardless of season, on unsatisfactory soil sites in the West Pasture at TES 370, 406, and portions of TES 481 and in unsatisfactory Rangeland Management Status (RMS) areas with a downward trend that are currently TES 370 and 406 in the West Pasture.</li> <li>2. Maintain minimum stubble heights on key herbaceous species at riparian and spring areas in partially functional status, which includes Milk Creek, Crooks Canyon, and Carter Spring in the West Pasture. The guideline is to maintain 8" of stubble where sedges and rushes are the key species, and 12" where deergrass is the key species.</li> </ol>			

<sup>1</sup> Animal-Unit-Month (AUM) is the amount of oven-dry forage required by one mature cow of about 1,000 pounds, either dry or with a calf up to six months of age, or their equivalent, for a standardized period of 30 animal-unit-days.

<sup>2</sup> Incidental use targets the lower range of the light use (0-30%) category in all seasons by applying such practices as herding or by limiting where livestock attractants such as salt or water are placed relative to the area of concern. Adaptive management methods and practices to achieve this will be based on site-specific allotment management scenarios.



## Other Site-specific Resource Protection Measures

In addition to the site-specific grazing intensity guidelines to be applied in areas of resource concerns, the following will also apply in areas where desired conditions are not being met:

- Apply 5 years of livestock distribution techniques and grazing intensity guidelines in the West Pasture. After the 5-year timeframe, if the attainable level of progress toward desired vegetative condition is not shown, one to three years of grazing rest will be implemented in the West Pasture. The attainable level of progress in TES 370 will be shown by comparing an ungrazed enclosure to adjacent grazed sites.
- Construct a fence around Ross Spring to prevent livestock access to the spring source in order to improve riparian herbaceous vegetation and channel stability. Develop the spring and provide livestock water outside the riparian zone.
- Apply 2 years of livestock distribution techniques to reduce impacts at Carter Spring. After the 2-year timeframe, if progress toward desired condition is not shown, a fence will be constructed to protect the water influenced area of the spring system. This fence will be configured to provide livestock water outside the fenced area.
- Maintain and modify the existing Ross Flat watershed improvement enclosure to continue to protect compacted and eroding soil sites and provide livestock water.

In the event that these 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, drift fences, additional livestock enclosures, temporary pipelines and water troughs, reconstruction of existing spring improvements and construction of new improvements such as spring boxes and water gaps.

## 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 and would not change the seasonal nature of the 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 will authorize livestock grazing on the Walnut Grove Allotment under the following terms:

- A term grazing permit will be issued providing for seasonal livestock use over a range of 123 to 606 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for up to 182 days between September 1<sup>st</sup> and April 15<sup>th</sup>. An AUM is defined as the average forage consumed by one cow/calf pair over a period of one month. As an example, this would provide for livestock numbers to range from 23 to 100 head of cattle, cow/calf pairs and bulls, for six months.
- Livestock will be managed under a rotational grazing system.

### **Range Structural Improvements**

The following structural improvements are authorized for construction as part of the selected alternative. The items listed as 1 through 6 are not mandatory construction activities, but may be implemented as adaptive management actions to improve livestock management and to help achieve resource objectives. However, if some or all of improvements listed at 1 through 6 are not implemented, then the upper limits of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable. Items listed at 7, 8, and 9 are constructed features that serve as resource protection measures. These will be constructed as soon as funding allows and are not discretionary, unless stated within the description as shown.

1. Increase water storage capacity at Deer Spring by adding a 3,000 to 5,000 gallon water storage tank.
2. Reconstruct the South Trick Tank water system.



3. Reconstruct the West Trick Tank. If resource objectives have not been met in the West Pasture before reconstruction is complete, additional measures such as a control valve or fence will be added to control livestock access to water in this area.
4. Increase water storage capacity by adding a 3,000 to 5,000 gallon storage tank at Deer Trick Tank and reconstruct the collection apron.
5. Reconstruct and maintain existing erosion control structures at Ross Flat (Forest Service Responsibility).
6. Reconstruct the Upper Tank in the East Pasture.
7. Modify the Ross Flat watershed exclosure fence by adding ½ to 1 mile of new fence. (Resource Protection Measure)
8. Construct a new fence around Ross Spring to control livestock access. (Resource Protection Measure)
9. Apply 2 years of livestock distribution techniques to reduce impacts at Carter Spring. After the 2-year timeframe, if progress toward desired condition is not shown, a fence will be constructed to protect the water influenced area of the spring system. This fence will be configured to provide livestock water outside the fenced area. (Resource Protection Measure)

**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.

The proposed action scoping letter sent on 7/09/2010 identified the need for maintenance work on a section of road used to access the South Trick Tank. Based on new evidence from field reconnaissance of the travel route into South Trick Tank, it was determined that road repair would not be needed to allow truck access, and there would be only minimal disturbance required for cross-country access to the range improvement to make the needed repairs. The overland travel route has been surveyed for heritage resources and there will be no impact to these resources. The cross-country travel to make repairs to South Trick Tank would be supervised by Forest Service personnel and would be authorized within the AOI.



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 soils and riparian areas are maintaining or moving toward desired conditions.
6. If critical areas are 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 and critical areas or on permanent transects at an interval of 10 years or less. Initial baseline information will be 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, while addressing the multiple use resource needs of the Agency as expressed in the desired conditions (pages 3-4 of the EA). Alternative 2 would 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; Economics; Soils; Water and Riparian Areas; Wildlife, Aquatic Species, and Rare Plants; Recreation; and Heritage (EA pages 25-47). I have reviewed these findings 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 providing for protection of important riparian resources at Ross Spring, and allowing for improvement of soils and vegetation by implementing reduced grazing intensities that will provide more residual ground cover. There is also a provision in this alternative to improve water availability in the uplands, which will reduce livestock reliance on water sources in riparian areas at Milk Creek and Crooks Canyon.

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

## Public Involvement

The Walnut Grove Grazing Allotment Management project has been listed in the Prescott National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since April 2010 at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>. A letter dated July 9, 2010 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 American Tribes interested in activities in the area inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The scoping letter resulted in three responses. The content of these responses was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official. 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 *Preliminary Environmental Assessment for the Walnut Grove 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 March 26, 2011. There were two responses received during this 30-day comment period that



generated 49 individual comments. Public comments and Prescott National Forest responses are included in the project planning record.

The forest compiled additional information related to the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the grazing alternatives, and decided to send out another EA that would disclose the additional information. The *Environmental Assessment for Walnut Grove Grazing Allotment Management* was sent to those that had responded to either the scoping letter or the Preliminary EA, and to the grazing permittee. The legal notice for the 30-day comment period on the second EA was published in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on June 7, 2011. There was one additional response received during this 30-day comment period that generated 32 individual comments. Public comments and Prescott National Forest responses are included in the project planning record.

## 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 Walnut Grove Allotment is located on the Bradshaw Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest. The allotment is located in the southwestern portion of the District, approximately 14 miles southeast of Kirkland Junction, Arizona. The vegetation on the allotment consists of pinyon/juniper woodlands, semi desert grasslands, and chaparral, with riparian vegetation found along Milk Creek and Crooks Canyon drainage and at some spring sites. The allotment occupies approximately 8,400 acres and is comprised of two large pastures, the East and West Units.

The primary watersheds being evaluated for cumulative effects of past, present, and future activities at the 6<sup>th</sup> level hydrologic unit code (HUC) are the Crooks Canyon, Milk Creek, Blind Indian Creek, and Moore's Spring – Upper Hassayampa 6<sup>th</sup> code HUCs. The Prescott National Forest administers 75% of the lands within these four 6<sup>th</sup> level watersheds. The larger 5<sup>th</sup> level HUC that contains the project area is the Upper Hassayampa watershed where the Prescott National Forest administers 63% of the lands within.

### 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 that includes the Blind Indian Creek Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) that comprises about 15% of the allotment. The selected alternative does not provide for construction of any new roads or trails, so the character of the existing IRA would be maintained (EA pages 44-45). There are no designated Wilderness Areas within or adjacent to the allotment. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches occurring within the Walnut Grove Allotment. A segment of the Verde River designated as a Scenic River in 1984 is located approximately 55 miles from the allotment. 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 Walnut Grove Allotment (EA pages 45-46).

**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 (pages 7 and 48, 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 24-47).

**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 24-47) discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA 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, because areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities have been surveyed and contain no known sites or structures that are currently listed or eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. 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 and the SHPO has concurred with the no adverse effect determination, and the Forest Supervisor approved the SHPO clearance on 6/2/2011 (see EA pages 45-47).

**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, Fish and Rare Plant Report for the Walnut Grove Allotment, prepared on 4/12/2011, documents the lack of species or habitat (Project Record document #37).

**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 4-6).



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: Walnut Grove 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](mailto: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.

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*Linda L. Jackson* *Sept. 14, 2011*  
**Linda L. Jackson** **Date**  
**District Ranger**

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