



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

DECISION NOTICE

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

Summary of specific components of Alternative 1, Yolo South Allotment

Number of Livestock	Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines
<p>Authorize variable seasonal grazing for no more than 4 months a year by a range of livestock numbers from 40-60 adult cattle. Under adaptive management, less than 40 cattle may be authorized in a given season depending on resource conditions and forage and water availability. The total authorization in a given season would not exceed 240 AUMs¹.</p>	<p>The allotment does not have interior pasture fencing, but natural barriers divide the allotment at Moonshine Canyon. Cattle currently use the area south of Moonshine Canyon only because there is no water on South Mesa. The season of use will be varied on the allotment to provide for growing season rest and deferment.</p>	<p>A management guideline of 35-45% utilization of key forage plants in upland key areas as measured at the end of the seasonal use period;</p> <p>Up to 50-60% leaders browsed 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 and eight inches where deergrass is the 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 species less than 6 feet tall.</p>

Site-specific Resource Protection Measures

The management objective for soil in TEUI 461 on the South Mesa portion of the allotment is to promote management activities that do not exacerbate a decline in soil function. This would include having conservative use levels on perennial grasses of 35-45% to allow for the maintenance of plant health and promote litter retention. This soil map unit is in an area that is

¹ An AUM is an Animal Unit Month, defined as a measure of the average amount of forage consumed by one cow-calf pair over the course of one month.

not currently grazed because it is separated by natural barrier from any available water, and cattle are not placed in this portion of the allotment. For these reasons, the actual utilization levels in this area will be because of wildlife and will be negligible. In the event that juniper thinning treatments are conducted on South Mesa at some time in the future, and a water source is constructed, then conservative use levels would be employed for livestock.

Range Structural Improvements

The following new structural improvements have been developed to improve grazing management. If some of these improvements are not implemented over the life of the term grazing permit, the upper limit of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable on a sustained basis, or seasonal use periods may be shortened.

- Fence Laurel Spring riparian vegetation and provide a pipeline and trough outside of the riparian zone to water livestock.
- Provide an additional water source (likely a water catchment apron, storage tank, and trough) north of Moonshine Canyon if grazing capacity is created due to juniper thinning (potential future project not being analyzed here).

Other Components of Alternative 1

Adaptive Management

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

Best Management Practices

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are a practice or combination of practices determined to be the most effective, practicable means of preventing or reducing the amount of pollution generated by nonpoint sources to a level compatible with water quality goals, and are developed

to comply with the Clean Water Act (FSH 2509.22_10.5). The Interdisciplinary Team followed the guidance in the Southwest Region Forest Service Handbook 2509.22, Chapter 20, and the National Core BMP Technical Guide, FS-990a, in the formulation of resource protection measures related to range management that also function as BMPs to address water quality and watershed concerns. These resource protection measures will be implemented in order to comply with the Clean Water Act.

New Range Improvements: The list of 2 new range improvements that are authorized for construction is shown on page 2.

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 as conditions warrant. All improvements identified on allotment maps have been evaluated and determined necessary to the management of the allotment through the life of this plan.

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-country 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. Approval is granted at annual authorization meetings or on a case by case basis.

Monitoring

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

1. Implementation monitoring will be conducted by the Forest Service, with possible assistance from the permittee, and may include but is not limited to the following: livestock actual use data, compliance with pasture rotation schedules, grazing intensity evaluations during the grazing season (within key and critical areas), utilization at the end of the growing season (within key areas), and visual observations of vegetation and ground cover.
2. Effectiveness monitoring to evaluate the success of management in achieving the desired objectives will occur within key areas at an interval of ten (10) years or less. A smaller subset of key areas may be evaluated that are in the areas needing improvement as identified in the EA. Areas already meeting desired conditions can be visually assessed to determine if conditions are being maintained. Effectiveness monitoring may also be conducted if data and observations from

implementation monitoring (annual monitoring) indicate a need. This type of monitoring can include species composition, plant cover, frequency or density, and/or vegetative ground cover monitored at key areas and at areas identified with site-specific resource concerns. Both qualitative and quantitative monitoring methods can be used. Methods for monitoring and inventory that are standard, accepted protocols can be found in the following publications: Region 3 Rangeland Analysis and Management Training Guide (USDA 2013 revised), Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health (Technical Reference 1730-37, 2010), and the Guide to Rangeland Monitoring and Assessment (Smith et al. 2012).

Monitoring activities would be focused on those resources that need improvement or where there is a concern for an important habitat type. For this project, there are soil condition concerns on South Mesa, but cattle are not being grazed on that portion of the allotment due to lack of water. Monitoring would be focused in the key grazed areas of the allotment to determine if allowable utilization levels are being met and satisfactory conditions are being maintained for vegetation and soil.

Decision Rationale

I have selected Alternative 1 because it meets the purpose and need for action described in the EA and allows desired conditions to be maintained in grazed areas while still providing the opportunity to support a local ranching operation. Existing vegetation condition in upland areas that are grazed are satisfactory, and will be maintained by implementing this proposal. The stocking level included in this proposal is a reduction from the current term grazing permit since it is recognized that cattle cannot utilize all the acreage of the allotment due to steep topography, natural barriers, and lack of water sources. This alternative allows for riparian vegetation to be protected at Laurel Spring while still providing access to water for livestock. The effects of implementing Alternative 1 have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA for Rangeland Vegetation, Soils, Watersheds and Water Resources, Wildlife, Aquatic Species, and Rare Plants; Recreation, and Heritage. 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 will maintain conditions that are already favorable by providing 8 months of rest each year that will be varied in season during the life of the term grazing permit and by balancing stocking levels with available forage so that conservative use levels are implemented.

Alternative 3, No Grazing, 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 Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management EA and the project record document the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

Public Involvement

Notice of the intention to initiate the present analysis of the proposed action for this allotment was provided in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/> beginning in January of 2015 and updated regularly. A letter dated 12/19/2014 describing the proposed action was sent to the permit holder of the allotment and to members of the public, non-profit groups, and other entities who have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to State and Federal government entities and to six Native American Tribes interested in activities in the area inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The content of the scoping responses was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official and resulted in the identification of no additional issues for the Yolo South Allotment that were not addressed within the design criteria of the proposed action. One additional alternative was developed as a result of public scoping, but it did not change the proposed management for the Yolo South Allotment from what was presented in Alternative 1.

The *Environmental Assessment for the Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management* was mailed to scoping respondents and the grazing permittees, and a legal notice announcing the start of the 30-day comment period was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on May 8, 2015. There were six responses received during the 30-day comment period. The responses were reviewed by the ID Team Leader, resource specialists, and the Deciding Official to determine if any new information was received that would have bearing on a decision between the three 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 Yolo South Allotment is located in the southwestern portion of the Chino Valley Ranger District, approximately 15 miles northeast of Bagdad. The allotment comprises approximately 3458 acres in a corner of the Prescott National Forest adjacent to private land and Arizona State Trust land. There is no interior pasture fencing but Moonshine Canyon provides a natural barrier. South Mesa north of Moonshine Canyon has no water, dense juniper over much of its area, and does not currently receive livestock use.

The predominant ecotypes on the allotment are pinyon-juniper with evergreen shrubs and interior chaparral. The grazed areas are mainly in the interior chaparral ecotype. Common perennial grasses include hairy grama, sideoats grama, threeawn, black grama, and plains lovegrass. Palatable shrubs include deerbrush and Apache plume. The slope gradient varies as there is a

mesa on the north portion and granitic hills and canyons to the south. Overall, slopes are moderate to steep with only 26% of the allotment acreage being under 10% slope.

Precipitation is bi-modal with monsoon events occurring during the summer and a period of precipitation occurring within the winter season with a high degree of variation from year to year. Average annual precipitation across the allotment varies with elevation and ranges from approximately 15 inches at the lower elevations to 18 inches at the upper.

The allotment contains parts of three 6th code subwatersheds, all nested within the Sycamore Creek 5th code watershed. The Sycamore Creek watershed drains to the Santa Maria River. The Santa Maria River and the Big Sandy River drainages merge at Alamo Lake to create the Bill Williams River, which drains to Alamo Lake and then connects to the Colorado River at Parker Dam.

Two primary streamcourses traverse through the allotment. Moonshine Canyon enters from the west for a distance of approximately 4.1 miles before emptying to Loco Creek. Loco Creek enters from the west and traverses southeast and then south below its confluence with Moonshine Canyon and then exits the allotment and the Forest to the south, a distance of approximately 2.9 miles. There are several identified springs in Moonshine Canyon and on hillsides. Large bedrock pools hold water for prolonged periods.

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 allotment is contained within the Sheridan Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). No new roads will be developed under Alternative 1. There are no wilderness areas within the allotment. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches. The allotment is known to contain cultural resources of both prehistoric and historic periods. The level of need and extent of new field surveys or inspections for grazing impacts will be determined by the Forest Archaeologist. If new surveys are determined necessary, these surveys will be conducted prior to the signing of the NEPA decision. Complete field survey of any given allotment or grouping of allotments will not be required. These procedures comply with the First Amended Programmatic Agreement Regarding Historic Property Protection and Responsibilities between the USDA Forest Service Region 3, the State Historic Preservation

Officers of AZ, NM, TX, and OK, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, signed 12/24/2003, and specifically, Appendix H: the Standard Consultation Protocol for Rangeland Management, signed 05/17/2007. A no adverse effect on the cultural resources is based on the Forest Service's proposal to continue the authorization of livestock grazing under an adaptive management system and in a manner consistent with the goals and objectives and the standards and guidelines of the PNF Land and Resource Management Plan.

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

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The Agency has considerable experience with actions that are similar to the selected alternative. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. This action is similar to many past actions, both in this analysis area and adjacent areas. Effects of this action will be similar to the effects of past, similar actions. Livestock grazing has occurred on the Prescott National Forest for over 100 years. The Interdisciplinary Team that conducted the analysis used the results of past actions as a frame of reference, and combined that insight with scientifically accepted analytical techniques and best available information to estimate effects of the proposal (See EA Chapter 3).

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

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The cumulative impacts have been displayed in this analysis in both the EA and in specialist reports contained in the project record. Chapter 3 of the EA discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA, specialist reports, and information identified during public review, I have concluded that there are no significant, cumulative impacts.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic

Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities will be surveyed and all cultural resources or historic sites will be avoided. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be completed prior to signing this decision.

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

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

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

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

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

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

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

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

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

Administrative Review (Objection) Opportunities

The Chino Small Grazing Allotments Management project is an activity implementing a land management plan and not authorized under the HFRA and is subject to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

How to file an Objection and Timeframe

Objections will only be accepted from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment in accordance with §218.5(a). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Reviewing Officer Teresa Chase, Forest Supervisor, 344 South Cortez, Prescott, AZ 86303, FAX: (928) 443-8008, or electronically at: objections-southwestern-prescott@fs.fed.us. Electronically filed objections may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html). Please include Yolo South Grazing Allotment in the subject line.

Objections must be submitted within 45 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice in the Prescott Courier. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the time to file an objection.

At a minimum, an objection must include the following (36 CFR 218.8(d)):

1. The objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
2. A signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for email may be filed with the objection);
3. When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector (verification of the identity of the lead objector shall be provided upon request);
4. The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the name(s) of the National Forest(s) and/or Ranger District(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented;
5. A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and

6. A statement that demonstrates connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection.

Incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in §218.8(b). It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to §218.9. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

The decision is appealable under 36 CFR 214.4(a) by the grazing permit holder only.

Implementation Date

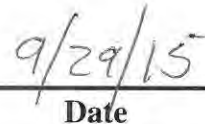
If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day from the close of the objection filing period. When objections are filed, there will be a 45-day period to resolve the objection.

Contact

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



Signature



Date

District Ranger

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