

Chapter 1. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Introduction

The USDA Forest Service proposes to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the Salida, Leadville and South Park Districts in a manner that moves resource conditions toward meeting Forest Plan objectives and desired on-the-ground conditions.

The planning area runs north of Leadville to south of Salida on the Salida, Leadville and South Park Ranger Districts in the Upper Arkansas River drainage. The Salida, Leadville and South Park are located on the Pike and San Isabel National Forest in Chaffee, Lake, Fremont, Park and Saguache counties of Colorado. The Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, “Forest Plan”) for the Pike and San Isabel National Forests, Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands, provides direction for management on the Pike and San Isabel National Forest.

Livestock grazing is just one of many activities that occur on these Ranger Districts. Livestock grazing has been determined by the LRMP to be an appropriate use of the project area based in part on the Forest Plan suitability determination. Livestock grazing permits are issued for a ten-year period on specific portions of the project area. An analysis conducted according to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is required in order to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the project area, to prescribe adaptive management of the rangeland resources, and to ensure management is capable of meeting or moving toward desired conditions.

The project area consists of 14 allotments (12 active cattle and horse grazing allotments, 1 vacant cattle and horse allotment and 1 vacant sheep and goat allotment) in the Salida-Leadville-South Park project area (SLS). There is a need for NEPA decisions to define appropriate management of livestock grazing and to support the continued authorization of livestock grazing through permit issuance as determined in the Forest Plan (PSICC Chapter II p 50).

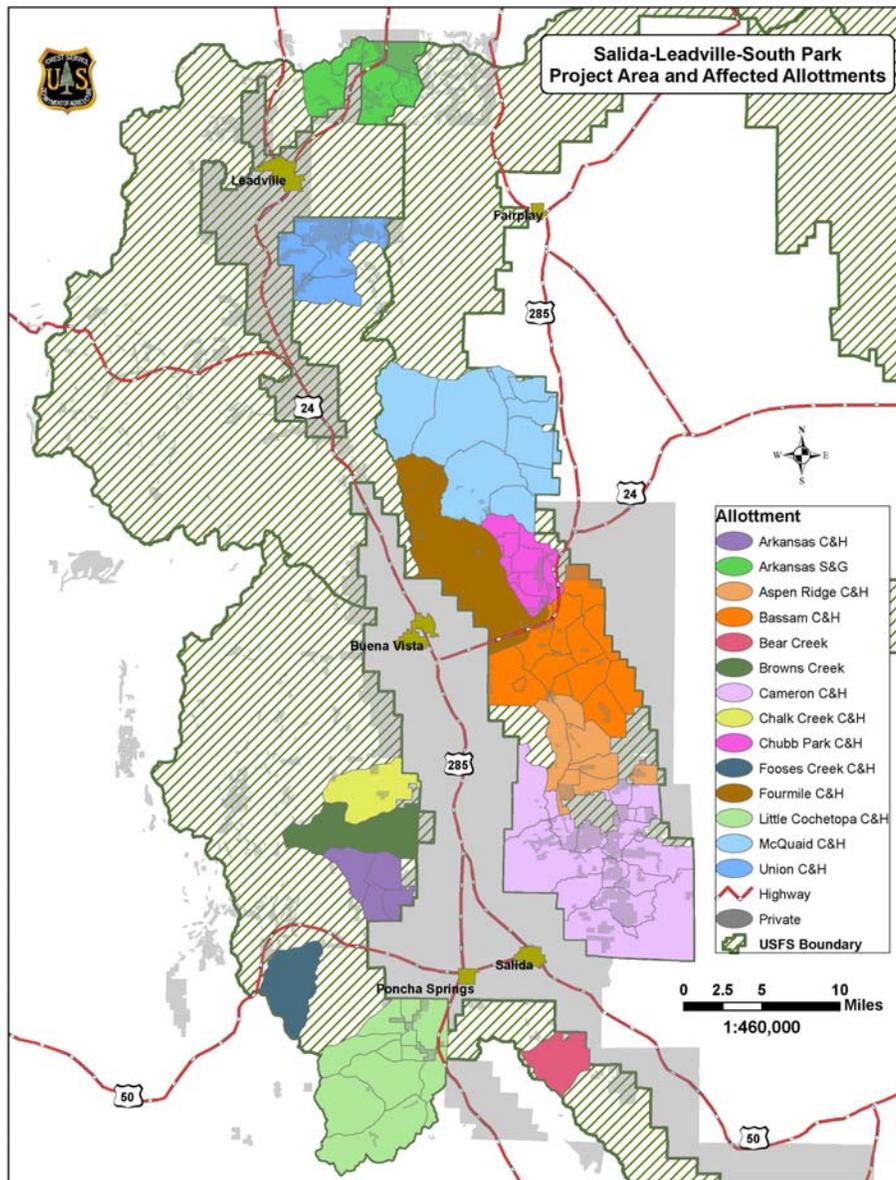
Currently, there are 6,760 Head Months (HMs) of livestock grazing provided within the project area. Allotments in the project area cover approximately 340,000 acres. About 180,000 acres (53 %) is classified as capable rangeland. Capable rangeland is accessible to livestock, produces forage or has inherent forage-producing capabilities, and can be grazed on a sustained basis under reasonable management practices (Rangeland Analysis & Management Training Guide) (RAMTG).

Within the capable rangeland, there are suitable rangelands. Suitable rangelands are those capable rangelands where there is no Forest Plan or other binding decisions to preclude the permitting of livestock grazing. Within the overall suitable/capable rangelands (hereafter referred to as Suitable rangelands), primary rangelands are those areas that livestock prefer to use when management is limited. This is the rangeland that will be overused before the secondary rangeland is fully used (Society for Range Management (SRM)). Approximately 36,360 acres (11%) of the project area is considered primary rangeland.

Forested vegetation communities include aspen, bristlecone pine, limber pine, blue spruce, lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, Engelmann spruce and Douglas fir. Non-forested areas consist primarily of perennial bunchgrass habitat and riparian plant communities. Elevations range from approximately 8,000 to 12,500 feet. Part of the study area in the Fourmile and Chubb allotments are in the North Trout Creek project area, while part of the study area in the Chalk Creek, Browns Creek and Arkansas C&H allotments is in the Westside Forest Health project area. The study area is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

The project area is located in Chaffee, Lake, Fremont, Park and Saguache counties, Colorado. Map 1-1 displays the geographic overview and 14 allotments of the Salida, Leadville and SouthPark Project Area (SLS).

Map 1-1 Project Area and Affected Allotments



1.2 Proposed Action

The proposed action is to continue to permit livestock grazing by incorporating adaptive management strategies on all 12 active and 2 vacant allotments within the SLS (see Table 1-1 for a list of allotments), while meeting LRMP direction which provides for a wide range of values and uses. The proposed action is designed to continue the improving trends in rangeland health, vegetation, watershed conditions, and in ecological sustainability relative to livestock grazing within the SLS. Collectively, these 14 allotments cover approximately 340,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands within the allotments. Chapter 2 presents a more detailed description of the proposed action and the need for action by allotment.

Table 1-1 Allotments in the Salida, Leadville, South Park Project Area

Allotments (Management Units) in the SLS	
Arkansas C&H (cattle and horse)- <i>Salida</i>	Chalk Creek C&H- <i>Salida</i>
Arkansas S&G (sheep and goat)- <i>Leadville/Vacant</i>	Chubb C&H- <i>Salida</i>
Aspen Ridge C&H- <i>Salida</i>	Fooses C&H- <i>Salida/Vacant</i>
Bassam C&H- <i>Salida</i>	Fourmile C&H- <i>Salida</i>
Bear Creek C&H- <i>Salida</i>	Little Cochetopa C&H- <i>Salida</i>
Browns Creek C&H- <i>Salida</i>	McQuaid C&H- <i>South Park</i>
Cameron C&H- <i>Salida</i>	Union C&H- <i>Leadville</i>

Allotment management plans (AMPs) are implementing documents for the NEPA decision. As such, they simply put the decision into language compatible with the term grazing permits and clearly understandable by all parties. In accordance with FSM 2210, AMPs, and therefore the selected alternative from this NEPA analysis, will consist of four elements designed to move the allotment towards the desired conditions. These are: (1) Desired Conditions; (2) Design Criteria; (3) Need for Action; and (4) Monitoring and Evaluation Standards.

The proposed action addresses each of these elements in Tables 1-4, 1-5, 2-5, and 2-6. A complete AMP will be developed incorporating the decision based on the analysis contained in this EA document. The revised AMPs will be prepared for individual allotments with implementation to begin in fiscal year 2007.

The selected alternative will include a monitoring plan to determine if actions are implemented as prescribed. Monitoring will evaluate progress towards desired conditions in a timely manner. Based upon the monitoring results, livestock grazing may be adjusted within specified adaptive management limits to ensure that specified management actions are being implemented as planned and that actions are moving resource conditions towards that desired conditions within the desired timeframes.

1.3 Existing Condition

Rangeland condition is evaluated by measuring how well ecosystem processes are functioning on the land. Evidence of properly functioning processes is expressed largely through the vegetative components of each community. Table 1-2 shows the generalized qualitative differences between rangelands in excellent and poor condition.

Table 1-2 Comparison of Rangeland Conditions

Excellent Rangeland Condition	↔	Poor Rangeland Condition
Desirable plant species abundant.		Desirable plants absent or few.
Desirable plants vigorous.		Desirable plants stressed.
Diverse age structure in plant community.		Structure confined to single age.
Increased diversity of plant species.		Little diversity in plant species.
Litter present and contacting soil.		Litter absent or not contacting soil.
Sufficient vegetation.		Insufficient vegetation.
Little bare ground.		Excessive bare ground.
Water soaks into ground.		Water runs off ground.
Sufficient litter cover.		Insufficient or excessive litter cover.
Soil surface protected by plants or litter.		Soil surface exposed.

Trend is determined where possible by comparing historical records (transects plots, inspection records, etc.) and photographs with current conditions and determining if conditions have improved, declined, or stayed the same. These trends are described as upward, downward, and static. Areas for which no historic data was available were described based on best currently available knowledge of the areas which generally indicates that they are at least in static trend and many may be in an upward trend.

Streams/Riparian areas were evaluated using “Proper Functioning Condition” (PFC) surveys and the “Riparian Characteristics Evaluations” R2-2200-RCS USFS from the Rangeland Analysis and Management Training Guide (USDA 1996) by interdisciplinary teams, including botany, wildlife, fisheries, hydrology, soils, and range management field personnel from the U.S. Forest Service.

Existing conditions for all allotments in the SLS are shown in Table 1-3. Benchmark areas and key areas for each pasture of the allotments are shown on maps in Appendix 1. The table shows how the existing conditions for each key area compare to what is actually desired for that site or that pasture in terms of meeting the desired conditions, not meeting the desired conditions or moving toward meeting the desired conditions within a reasonable timeframe.

To summarize Table 1-3, of 29 benchmark areas in the SLS, 10% are currently meeting the desired conditions, 9% are moving toward meeting the desired conditions and 10% are not meeting the desired conditions. So, 19% of the pastures in the project area are meeting or moving toward the desired conditions for the ecosystem types represented in those benchmark areas.

Table 1-3 Existing Condition, Trends and Status of Benchmark Areas in the SLS

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
<p>Arkansas C&H</p>	<p>Alpine - Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities, ground cover is suitable where developed soils exist. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Grassland - Species diversity present in grasses and forbs. Drought stress evident. Noxious weeds present (Canada thistle, yellow toadflax, spotted knapweed). Fair condition. Static-downward trend.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover. High incidence of Kentucky bluegrass and introduced clover in some areas. Noxious weeds present (Canada thistle, toadflax) in some locations. Drought stress evident. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow – Limited in occurrence. Diverse communities of riparian and upland graminoids present. Drought stress evident. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Drought stress evident. High incidence of Kentucky bluegrass and introduced clover. High incidence of bare ground in some locations. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Pinyon /Juniper – present but very limited to east boundary.</p> <p>Aspen - Diverse native grass and forb understory. Downed logs present. Diverse age structure present. Use of regeneration as browse is excessive in some areas. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 40% of the ponderosa community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands of ponderosa pine. Lodgepole is limited in occurrence. Mixed conifer past spruce budworm activity as resulted in a loss of 20% of the community. Upland grasses increasing in quality and quantity due to decrease of overstory vegetation cover due to dead and dying trees. Canopy cover is decreasing with mortality under story is increasing. Understory areas are expanding. Understory is in good condition. Overstory is in fair to poor/declining condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Weldon Gulch - moving toward ● High Unit – moving toward
<p>Arkansas S&G (vacant)</p>	<p>Vacant since 1998</p> <p>Alpine - Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities. Ground cover is suitable where appropriate. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Noxious weeds in limited areas (Canada thistle, yellow toadflax, dalmation toadflax). Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian -Good vegetation cover. Good condition. Static-upward trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow –Diverse communities of riparian and upland graminoids present. Drought stress evident. Fair condition. Static trend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No benchmark selected

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	<p>Bench/Transition areas – Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities. Ground cover is suitable where appropriate. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Aspen - Diverse native grass and forb understory. Diverse age structure present. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Lodgepole mature stands. Minimal grass understory. Mixed conifer stands are mature. Good condition. Static trend.</p>	
Aspen Ridge	<p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Upland grasses decadent and underused. Decadent grasses increase with distance from riparian. High incidence of bare ground and litter. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle, shepherd’s purse). Drought stress evident. Fair condition.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - High incidence of streambank trampling, pedestalling and areas of active headcutting. Riparian and upland graminoids present, but decreasing with a high incidence of forbs and Kentucky bluegrass. Lack of willow vegetation. Drought stress evident. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle). High incidence of bare ground. Fair-poor condition.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow - Riparian and upland graminoids present, but need to expand extent of wetted soils. Areas of pedestalling. Drought stress evident. Fair-poor condition.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas - Plant loss evident on perennial grasses due to drought. Evidence of species shift from bunchgrass to forb species. Fringed sage has encroached in some areas. Canada thistle present in some areas. Some benches early to mid-seral with high incidence of forbs. High incidence of bare ground. Fair-poor condition.</p> <p>Upland Shrub – Limited in extent. Good growth and regeneration of upland shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good condition.</p> <p>Aspen - Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, a mosaic of understory grasses vary from vigorous to decadent. Evidence of disease and die-off of aspen in some areas. Fair-good condition.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 25% of this community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands. Tree litter is excessive. Mixed conifer stands are mature, some evidence of mortality. Fair condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Calf Gulch - not meeting ● Coons Park - not meeting ● Bull Gulch - not meeting

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
Bassam	<p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Drought stress evident. Fair- Poor condition in some pastures, good condition in others. Long-term trend upward, recent downward trend due to drought.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover. Willow and riparian graminoids present and diverse in age structure and species. Some willow die-off due to drought. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle). Range of condition from fair to very good, with some sites evaluated as poor. Long-term trend upward, recent downward trend due to drought.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow - Riparian and upland graminoids present, but need to expand extent of wetted soils. Drought stress evident. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle, Russian olive). Fair to good condition. Many sites have CCC plantations of Ponderosa pine. Long-term trend upward, recent downward trend due to drought.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Plant loss evident on perennial grasses due to drought. Canada thistle present in some areas. Some benches early to mid-seral with high incidence of forbs. Good-fair condition. Long-term trend upward, recent downward trend due to drought.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good condition. Limited in occurrence. Static trend.</p> <p>Pinyon/Juniper- Limited to Bald Mtn pasture.</p> <p>Aspen - Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, a mosaic of understory grasses vary from vigorous to decadent. Evidence of disease and die-off of aspen in some areas. Fair-good condition.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 40% of this community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands. Tree litter is excessive. Mixed conifer stands are mature, some evidence of mortality. Fair condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dry Lakes – not meeting ● Castle Rock Gulch – moving toward
Bear Creek	<p>Alpine – Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities, ground cover is suitable where developed soils exist. Good condition. Trend is not apparent.</p> <p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (downy brome). Good condition. Upward trend.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover in most areas. Riparian graminoids present. Drought stress evident in some areas. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle). Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow – Limited in occurrence. Riparian and upland graminoids present, but need to expand extent of wetted soils. High incidence of introduced clover. Drought stress evident. Fair condition. Long-term trend upward, recent downward trend may be due to drought.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Plant loss evident on perennial grasses may be due to drought. Some benches early to mid-seral with high incidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spring Gulch - moving toward

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	<p>of forbs. Fair-poor condition. Long-term trend upward, recent downward trend may be due to drought.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Oak brush dense and impenetrable in some areas. Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Pinyon/Juniper- Limited in occurrence in lower sites. Mid-late seral. Good condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Aspen –Diverse age structure present including regeneration. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present. Grasses decadent in some areas. Aspen dense and impenetrable in some areas. Good condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 65% of the ponderosa community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands of ponderosa pine. Mixed conifer stands are dense and minimally affected by insects and disease. Limited amounts of Lodgepole present. Ponderosa pine is in poor condition, downward trend. Mixed conifer is in good condition, static trend.</p>	
Browns Creek	<p>Non-use 2003-05.</p> <p>Alpine - Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities, ground cover is suitable where appropriate. Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Upland grasses largely decadent. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle, diffuse knapweed). Fair-good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover. Willow communities present, diverse. Some pedestalling and hedging of willows. Stable channel types. Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow - Riparian graminoids present, diverse and vigorous. Willow communities present, diverse. Some pedestalling. Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Pinyon/Juniper- Limited in occurrence in lower sites. Mid-late seral. Good condition..</p> <p>Aspen – Limited in occurrence in lower sites. Diverse age structure present including regeneration. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Good condition.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer/Spruce Fir Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle in the lower sites. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands of ponderosa pine. Upper sites trees (mixed conifer, spruce fir) dense.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Upper Browns- moving toward ● Lower Browns- not meeting

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
Cameron	<p>Grassland – Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Bunchgrass species decreasing throughout allotment. Fringed sage increasing. High incidence of bare ground in areas. Drought stress evident. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle). Fair-poor condition.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian – Poor-fair vegetation cover. Willow communities present and diverse in some areas. Drought stress evident. High incidence of Kentucky bluegrass and forbs. Fair-poor condition.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow – Limited in occurrence on Forest Service land. Riparian and upland graminoids present, but with a high percentage of forbs. Meadows are drying and decreasing in extent.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas –High incidence of bare ground in areas. Drought stress evident. High incidence of weedy species and forbs. Fringed sage increasing. Fair-poor condition.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good-fair condition.</p> <p>Pinyon/Juniper- Mature stands in places. Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities in the understory. Encroachment of pinyon/juniper in meadows and grasslands. Fair condition.</p> <p>Aspen - Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, a mosaic of understory grasses vary from vigorous to decadent. Fair-good condition.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 40% of this community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands. Tree litter is excessive. Mixed conifer stands are mature, some evidence of mortality. Fair condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Willow –not meeting
Chalk Creek	<p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Upland grasses increasing in quality and quantity due to decrease of overstory vegetation through diseased timber, thinning, and prescribed burning of grasses in the allotment. Noxious weeds limited (downy brome, Canada thistle) Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover. Willow community with diverse age structure and riparian graminoids present. Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow –. A mix of riparian and upland graminoids and forbs present. Willow communities present. Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Limited in occurrence.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Mature shrub community composed of mountain mahogany, rubber rabbitbrush, and currant. Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Mountain mahogany hedged. Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Pinyon/Juniper- Stands mature in places. Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities in the understory. Encroachment of pinyon/juniper in meadows and grasslands. Fair condition. Trend not</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No benchmark selected

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	<p>apparent.</p> <p>Aspen – Diverse age structure including regeneration with an understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present. Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine minimally affected by mountain pine beetle. Bunchgrass understory is increasing as canopy cover was reduced due to beetle kill, timber thinning and prescribed burning. Mixed conifer stands are dense and minimally affected by insects and disease. Understory areas are expanding. Understory is in good condition. Overstory is in good condition.</p>	
Chubb	<p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs. Established upland grasses lacking vigor. Drought stress evident. Low productivity on State owned lands. Noxious weeds presence localized (Canada & musk thistle). Fair condition. Current trend unknown, historic trend is upward.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian – State owned lands poor vegetation cover, composition, and structure. Willow vegetation lacking in lower reaches. Fair-poor condition. Forest Service land has good vegetation cover with native riparian species present with some non-native species present (Canada & musk thistle, pennycress, smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass). Recent willow dieback possibly due to drought. PFC condition rated as functioning at risk. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow – does not occur on State lands. Forest lands: Hummocking present. Species composition dominated by tufted hairgrass. Good condition and trend not apparent.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas –State lands: Bare ground higher than expected. Fair to poor vegetation cover of native species present with non-native species present (Canada & musk thistle). Drought stress evident. Fair-poor condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Forest lands: Localized incidence of bare ground. Fair vegetation cover of native species present with non-native species present (Canada & musk thistle). Shrubby cinquefoil die off occurring. Fair-poor condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Upland Shrub – Mature shrub community composed of mountain mahogany, rubber rabbitbrush, mountain sagebrush, and currant. Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Mountain mahogany hedged. Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Aspen – Understory of down logs, with native forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Limited age class structure and conifer encroachment in some areas. Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 60% of the ponderosa community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands of ponderosa pine. Lodgepole is limited in occurrence. Mixed conifer past spruce</p>	<p>• Upper Chubb - moving toward</p>

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	budworm activity as resulted in a loss of 40% of the community. Upland grasses increasing in quality and quantity due to decrease of overstory vegetation cover due to dead and dying trees. Canopy cover is decreasing with mortality under story is increasing. Understory areas are expanding. Understory is in good condition. Overstory is in fair to poor/declining condition.	
Fooses Creek	<p>Non-use since 1998- vacant as of 2001</p> <p>Alpine - Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities, ground cover is suitable where appropriate. Good condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetation structure. Some upland grasses decadent. Fair-good condition. Static trend</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Vegetation cover present in most areas, both willow and riparian graminoids present. Noxious weeds in limited areas (yellow toadflax, Canada thistle). Good-fair condition. Static-upward trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow – Limited in occurrence. Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Upland Shrub – Upland shrubs largely decadent. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Aspen – Diverse age structure including regeneration with an understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present. Aspen is being encroached by conifer in some locations. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Fair-Good condition. Static trend</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 25% of the ponderosa community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands of ponderosa pine. Lodgepole is limited in occurrence. Mixed conifer past spruce budworm activity as resulted in a loss of 40% of the community. Upland grasses increasing in quality and quantity due to decrease of overstory vegetation cover due to dead and dying trees. Canopy cover is decreasing with mortality under story is increasing. Understory areas are expanding. Understory is in good condition. Overstory is in fair to poor/declining condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No benchmark selected
Fourmile	<p>Non-use 2002-2004, 2006; lightly stocked in 2005</p> <p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs. Upland grasses decadent in areas. Drought stress evident throughout allotment. High incidence of bare ground. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover in most stream channels. Willow and riparian graminoids present and diverse in age structure and species. Cottonwood regeneration lacking. Poor-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow – Diverse mixture of forbs, graminoids and shrubs. Systems have experienced significant drying. Need to increase water-holding capabilities and expand extent of wetted soils. Fair-poor condition. Downward trend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goddard- moving toward • Davis Meadows-meeting • Sevenmile Creek-not meeting

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	<p>Bench/Transition areas –High incidence of bare ground in areas. Drought stress evident. High incidence of weedy species and forbs. Fringed sage increasing. Noxious weeds in limited areas (downy brome, Canada thistle, leafy spurge)) Poor condition. Static-downward trend.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Pinyon/Juniper- Stands decadent in places. Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities in the understory. Encroachment of pinyon/juniper in meadows and grasslands. Fair condition. Downward trend.</p> <p>Aspen – Evidence of impact to structure and native plant communities in some areas. Aspen is being encroached by conifer. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Fair-poor condition. Downward trend</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 40% of the ponderosa community is dead or dying. Bunchgrass understory is increasing under dead stands of ponderosa pine. Lodgepole is limited in occurrence. Mixed conifer past spruce budworm activity as resulted in a loss of 40% of the community. Upland grasses increasing in quality and quantity due to decrease of overstory vegetation cover due to dead and dying trees. Canopy cover is decreasing with mortality under story is increasing. Understory areas are expanding. Understory is in good condition. Overstory is in fair to poor/declining condition.</p>	
<p>Little Cochetopa</p>	<p>Alpine – Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities, ground cover is suitable where developed soils exist. Good condition. Trend is not apparent.</p> <p>Grassland – Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. High incidence of litter. Upland grasses decadent in some areas. Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Good vegetation cover, willow communities present and vigorous in most locations with isolated problem areas. High incidence of Kentucky bluegrass. Noxious weeds present in main drainages (Canada thistle, yellow toadflax, hoary cress and downy brome). Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow –Diverse mix of riparian and upland native grass, forb and shrub species. High incidence of forbs. Systems have experienced significant drying. Areas of have shown a decrease in wetted area. Some hummocking present in wet meadows. Fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Limited areas with good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Main drainages have a high incidence of Kentucky bluegrass. Bare ground and weedy species and forbs present. Noxious weeds in limited areas (Canada thistle, yellow toadflax, hoary cress and downy brome). Fair condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Marshall Pass – not meeting ● Beaver Creek - meeting ● Murphy’s Hole – not meeting ● Head of Little Cochetopa - meeting

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	<p>Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Upland Shrub - Mature shrub community composed of mountain mahogany, mountain sagebrush, and currant. Good growth and regeneration of mid-late seral shrub species. Native grasses and forbs interspersed. Mountain mahogany hedged in areas. Good-fair condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Aspen – Diverse age structure including regeneration with an understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present. Aspen is being encroached by conifer in some locations. Regeneration is limited in areas. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Fair-Good condition. Trend not apparent.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Ponderosa pine largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 75% of the ponderosa community is dead or dying. Lodgepole is limited in occurrence. Mixed conifer past spruce budworm activity as resulted in a loss of 15% of the community. Upland grasses increasing in quality and quantity due to decrease of overstory vegetation cover due to dead and dying trees. Canopy cover is decreasing with mortality under story is increasing. Understory areas are expanding. Understory is in good condition. Overstory is in fair to poor/declining condition.</p>	
McQuaid	<p>Grassland – Some upland grasses decadent and underused. Decadent grasses increase with distance from riparian, although proportion of decadent is decreasing with recent improved grazing use. High incidence of bare ground in some areas. Drought stress evident in perennial grasses. Fair to Good condition. Upward trend.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian –Diverse and vigorous set of riparian graminoids present in most stream/riparian locations. Willows on the increase, even in areas where willows had been grazed out in the past. Noxious weeds present in some areas (Canada thistle). Good to Excellent condition. Upward trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow - Vigorous communities of riparian and upland graminoids present. Highly diverse communities. Drought stress less evident in these areas. Good-Excellent condition. Upward trend.</p> <p>Aspen – Upland grasslands in aspen and hill country underused, especially when compared to other community types. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Evidence of disease in some areas. Aspen old, dense and impenetrable in some areas. Conifer encroachment happening on north-facing slopes. Elk use high, especially along the eastern half of the allotment. Fair- Poor condition. Downward trend.</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Largely infested by mountain pine beetle. Trees dense and drought stressed. Up to 40% of this community is dead or dying. Fair-Poor condition. Downward trend.</p> <p>Upland Shrub – Old communities of mountain big sage. Communities of mountain mahogany and mixed shrubs are being heavily impacted by</p>	<p>Dry Lake – not meeting</p> <p>Pony Creek – meeting</p> <p>Buffalo Creek – meeting</p> <p>Rough-n-Tumblin – meeting</p> <p>Willow Creek – meeting</p> <p>Buffalo Springs – moving toward</p> <p>Brush Park – moving toward</p> <p>Buffalo Meadows - meeting</p>

<i>Allotment</i>	<i>Existing Condition</i>	<i>Benchmark Area Not Meeting, Meeting or Moving Toward Desired Conditions</i>
	<p>elk and deer. Sever browsing on these plants has produced a clubbed appearance. Some communities are interspersed with healthy populations of grasses and forbs, while others are surrounded by high percentages of bare ground. Fair-Poor condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Plant loss evident on perennial grasses due to drought. Fringed sage has encroached in some areas. Some benches early to mid-seral with high incidence of forbs. Good-Fair condition. Upward trend.</p>	
Union	<p>Alpine - Diverse mix of native grass, forb and shrub communities, ground cover is suitable where developed soils exist. Species composition shifting to a less desirable alpine mix. Poor condition. Downward trend.</p> <p>Grassland - Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Decadent grasses increase with distance from riparian. Fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Stream/Riparian - Mosaic of riparian graminoids and willows present. Riparian vegetation dense and vigorous. Some areas decadent. Good condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Mesic Meadow - Combination of forbs, graminoids and shrubs. Areas of have shown a decrease in wetted area. Fair condition. Downward trend.</p> <p>Bench/Transition areas – Good species diversity present in grasses and forbs, with a mosaic of vegetative structure. Noxious weeds present in limited areas (Canada thistle downy brome, leafy spurge, toad flax). Good-fair condition. Static trend.</p> <p>Upland Shrub- Sagebrush is decadent. Loss of grasses and forbs in sage communities is evident. Poor condition. Downward trend.</p> <p>Aspen – Diverse age structure including regeneration with an understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present. Aspen is being encroached by conifer in some locations. Understory of down logs, forbs and grasses present, but grasses largely decadent. Fair-Good condition. Static trend</p> <p>Ponderosa Pine/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest – Lodgepole mature stands. Minimal grass understory. Mixed conifer stands are mature. Mountain pine beetle activity at endemic levels. Good condition. Static trend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empire Gulch - meeting ● Empire Reservoir - meeting

1.4 Desired Condition

Desired conditions are the on-the-ground resource conditions that management is working towards within a defined timeframe. These are the results that are expected if management goals and objectives are fully achieved. They are based in significant part on bringing the broad scale desired conditions from the Forest Plan down to the project level. Table 1-4 describes the desired future conditions for each general community ecosystem found within the SLS.

Table 1-4 Desired Condition for Resource Ecosystems

<u>RESOURCE ECOSYSTEM COMMUNITY TYPE</u>	<u>DESIRED CONDITION</u>
Alpine	Provide a diverse mix of desirable native grass, forb and shrub communities. Where developed soils exist, ground cover is 80% or greater.
Ponderosa/Lodgepole/Mixed Conifer Forest	Forests with diverse age structure, late successional communities, openings, snags and down woody debris across forested areas; vigorous understory of native grasses (grama, needle and thread, junegrass, Arizona fescue, mountain muhly, mutton grass) and forbs where light allows. Achieve or maintain satisfactory range condition on all forested rangeland in this community type.
Aspen	Perpetuate aspen communities with diverse age structures including late successional communities, regeneration, openings, snags and down woody debris across aspen areas; vigorous and diverse native grass and forb understory present. Use of aspen regeneration as browse is limited to light use (up to 40%) as defined by the Range Analysis and Management Training Guide (RAMTG).
Upland Shrub	Vigorous growth and regeneration of a mosaic of shrub age classes and species (mountain mahogany, rabbitbrush, sagebrush, oakbrush) interspersed with a variety of native grasses and forbs. Range condition is satisfactory or better on all rangeland in this community type.
Pinyon/Juniper	Provide a mosaic of age classes, open and dense stands. An understory of native mixed bunchgrass, shrub and forb communities in open areas (grama, needle and thread, junegrass, Arizona fescue, Indian ricegrass).
Grassland	Mixed native grass and forb communities provide a mosaic of plants with species diversity, a variety of vegetative structures and sufficient amounts of litter. Principle grass species may include Arizona fescue, thurber's fescue, muhly species, Parry's oatgrass, native brome, grama species, needle and thread. Grass communities show vigor and range condition is satisfactory or better on all rangeland in this community type.
Mesic Meadow	Diverse mix of native upland and riparian graminoids and forbs present with significant proportions of riparian species relative to moisture availability. Riparian species to include at least two of the following: bluejoint reedgrass, tufted hairgrass, wiregrass, spikerush, meadow foxtail, riparian sedges. Range condition is excellent based on site potential. Graminoid communities show vigor.

<u>RESOURCE ECOSYSTEM COMMUNITY TYPE</u>	<u>DESIRED CONDITION</u>
Bench/Transition areas (qualities of both riparian and upland communities)	<p>Stabilized slopes adjacent to riparian areas, vegetated with a diverse mix of native upland and riparian grasses and forbs. Maintain desirable native vegetation species Minimize undesirable specie encroachment (Kentucky bluegrass, fringed sage, introduced clovers). Reduce bare ground to less than 10 percent.</p>
Streams & Riparian areas	<p>Maintain all riparian ecosystems in at least an upper mid-seral stage based upon the R2 Riparian Ecosystem Rating System (PSICC LRMP, III-50). Provide healthy, self-perpetuating plant communities, meet water quality standards, provide habitats for viable populations of wildlife and fish, and provide stable stream channels and still water-body shorelines (PSICC LRMP, III-203).</p> <p>Achieve desired condition of riparian areas by following the standards set forth in the Watershed Conservation Practices (WCP) Handbook, FSH 2509.25. Section 12 deals specifically with Riparian Areas. Management measure (3) of this section states, “In the water influence zone (WIZ) next to perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, and wetlands, allow only those actions that maintain or improve long-term stream health and riparian ecosystem condition.” Adherence to the design criteria within this standard will help to sustain riparian areas at or move them toward their desired conditions.</p> <p>Where a defined channel exists (perennial and intermittent), streams and riparian ecosystems will be managed to be at a “proper functioning condition” state as defined by the Bureau of Land Management (Technical Reference 1737-9). Conduct actions so that stream pattern, geometry (profile and dimension), and habitats are maintained or improved. Where a defined channel does not exist, the area will be managed to maintain the hydrologic function and provide for self-perpetuating plant communities in riparian corridors/pockets.</p>

1.5 Purpose and Need

1.51 Purpose.

The site-specific purpose for the proposed action is twofold. First is to continue to permit livestock grazing on all or portions of the project area. Second and inter-related is to design and implement an adaptive management system that will move resource conditions from the existing conditions toward the desired conditions for the resource ecosystems in a manner that is timely and consistent with LRMP objectives, standards, and guidelines.

Authorization of livestock grazing and management in an adaptive manner is appropriate on the project area because:

- Where consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives there is Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands. (*Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976*)
- The allotments contain lands identified as suitable for domestic livestock grazing in the Pike and San Isabel National Forests; Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands (PSICC) Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP or “Forest Plan”) and continued domestic livestock grazing is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines of the Forest Plan (LRMP pages III-161-168, III-35-40, II-74, and II-81).
- It is Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing consistent with land management plans (*FSM 2203.1; 36 CFR 222.2 (c)*). Updated management strategies will outline how livestock will be grazed and at what levels will be developed to assure implementation of Forest Plan management direction, and meet Section 504 of Public Law 104-19 (Rescission Bill, signed 7/27/95), which requires revision of existing allotment management plans.
- It is Forest Service policy to continue contributions 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 2202.1*).
- The PSICC Forest Plan, which directs the management of lands contained within this project area, has as one its goals to “Provide forage to sustain local dependent livestock industry” (Forest Plan, LRMP page II-35).

1.52 Need.

The site-specific need for the proposed action is based on knowing that a change in management needs to occur. This need for change in management is identified by comparing what currently exists on the landscape in the SLS and comparing that to specific descriptions of what should exist in those different community types across the project area.

- There is a need for change from current management, as some specific areas on allotments within the project area may not be meeting or moving toward desired conditions in an acceptable timeframe.

- The need for action is created by the disparity between what is present (existing condition) and what is wanted (desired condition). The specific action needs for each allotment which are not meeting or moving toward desired conditions in an acceptable timeframe are summarized in Table 1-5.

Table 1-5 Allotment Specific Needs for Action

1-5.a

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Arkansas C&H Allotment:</u> <i>Allotment wide</i></p>	<p>See Table 1.</p> <p>Habitat is present and/or species present for the following TES wildlife species and species of concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lynx • UFB • boreal toad • leopard frog • ptarmigan • elk –winter range, and concentration area • deer - winter range and concentration area • mountain goat winter range • bighorn sheep winter range and concentration area • riparian species <p>Upland sampling within the pasture indicated a shift in species composition. Least desirable species have increased in frequency</p> <p>Heavy beetle-kill in ponderosa, salvage operations on-going.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Protect and maintain suitable habitat conditions for TES/species of concern</p> <p>Improve bunchgrass cover species composition on upland areas. Reduce noxious weed composition.</p> <p>Improve cover frequency for Parry’s oatgrass.</p> <p>Reduce recreation conflict.</p> <p>Not meeting desired condition.</p> <p>Maintain and improve riparian vigor, increase willow, increase litter cover in upland and maintain and improve cover of Thurber fescue.</p> <p>Improve species composition on upland areas. Decrease percentage cover of least desirables.</p> <p>Move toward PFC in Placer Creek</p> <p>Decrease ungulate grazing pressure on riparian areas.</p> <p>Maintain PFC.</p>	<p>Upland water sources are limited to improve distribution of cattle to the uplands.</p> <p>Develop water out of the riparian bottoms</p> <p>Riparian water developments (pits) are poorly located and designed.</p> <p>Improve riparian condition.</p> <p>Identify and address potential conflicts between TES/species of concern and livestock grazing</p> <p>Infrastructure within the pasture is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>Species composition less than desired in pasture.</p> <p>Cattle trailing and trampling is present within the riparian area.</p>

1-5.b

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p>Aspen Ridge Allotment: <i>Allotment wide</i></p>	<p>See Table 1.</p> <p>Riparian areas located in the pasture have pedestalling and concentrated use by ungulates.</p> <p>Poor design of existing water developments contributing to riparian area degradation</p> <p>Occurrence of a sensitive <i>Machaeranthera Coloradoensis</i> (Colorado Tansy aster)</p> <p>Upland and bench transition grasses are lacking vigor</p> <p>Woody component lacking (<10%). Evidence of ungulate browsing on young willow limiting regeneration</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Increase upland and bench transition plant vigor.</p> <p>Reduce the amount of bare ground in areas of the bench transition to below 30%.</p> <p>Increase bunchgrass vigor. Decrease litter and bare ground.</p> <p>Decrease ungulate grazing pressure on riparian areas.</p> <p>Improve species composition on upland areas. Increase the woody component and manage for willow regeneration.</p> <p>Decrease bare ground in the isolated areas to less than 30% and establish desirable bunchgrass species and native forb mix</p> <p>Move to PFC. Increase native grass, forb and salix vigor and cover in the riparian, bench./transition and upland grasses. Reduce bare ground, hummocking, pedestalling and bank trampling</p>	<p>Willow regeneration and cover is less than desired.</p> <p>Bare ground on the bench transition area is over 75%.</p> <p>Upland water sources are limited to improve distribution of cattle to the uplands.</p> <p>Vigor of upland and bench transition grasses is low.</p> <p>Bare ground is higher than desired in areas of the bench transition area</p> <p>Improve riparian condition.</p> <p>Infrastructure within the pasture is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>Incidence of bare ground higher than desired in isolated areas.</p> <p>Cattle trailing and trampling is present within the riparian area.</p> <p>Species composition less than desired in isolated areas.</p> <p>High potential for willow with a low occurrence of willow.</p> <p>Pedestalling occurring in the riparian areas.</p> <p>Active head cutting occurring.</p> <p>Bunchgrasses lack vigor and are largely decadent away from riparian.</p> <p>Riparian water developments are poorly located</p> <p>Leaf litter is less than desired for wildlife.</p>

1-5.c

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Bear Creek Allotment:</u> <i>Allotment wide</i></p>	<p>Cheatgrass present in the bench transition and in oak brush communities. 80 acre site of sensitive plant specie Bill’s Neoparrya is present and is currently being grazed.</p> <p>Increased fuel loading caused by pine beetle infestations.</p> <p>Lynx habitat and winter range for elk and deer present and in satisfactory condition.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Increase native bunchgrass species component.</p> <p>Decrease the presence of Kentucky bluegrass and annual forbs. Reduce litter and bare ground. Minimize trampling.</p> <p>Manage to obtain PFC</p>	<p>Recreational conflicts exist with dispersed camping in Bear Creek, and motorized/bike access to Rainbow Trail on FSR 101.</p> <p>Maintain or improve riparian condition.</p> <p>Infrastructure within the pasture is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>Limited stock water available in the uplands to encourage livestock distribution and discourage livestock concentrations in low lying areas.</p> <p>Maintain existing Bill’s Neoparrya population.</p> <p>Maintain adequate forage for resident elk herd.</p> <p>Decrease livestock concentrations in areas of special concern for cultural resources.</p> <p>Permitted livestock are breaching the southeast boundary of the allotment.</p> <p>Maintain snowshoe hare habitat for lynx.</p>

1-5.d

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Browns Creek Allotment:</u> Allotment wide</p>	<p>See Table 1.</p> <p>Bunchgrasses are lacking vigor and decadent in areas. Understory forage increasing</p> <p>Boreal toad habitat present. Lynx habitat present.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Increase vigor of bunchgrasses where needed.</p> <p>Maintain beaver dams and activities to perpetuate or enhance the existing PFC's.</p>	<p>Recreational conflicts exist with recreational users on the Browns Creek and Wagon Loop trails.</p> <p>Conflict with recreational livestock utilizing available forage.</p> <p>Maintain riparian condition.</p> <p>Infrastructure within the pasture is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>Protect boreal toad breeding habitat areas</p>

1-5.e

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Cameron Allotment:</u> Allotment wide</p>	<p>See Table 1.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Manage for grassland DC</p> <p>Manage for riparian DC.</p> <p>Increase plant vigor and bunchgrass frequency</p> <p>Maintain native grass species</p> <p>Decrease the amount of bare ground. Increase species diversity and cover with desirable species.</p>	<p>Improve distribution to the uplands.</p> <p>Upland water sources are lacking.</p> <p>Maintain or improve riparian condition.</p> <p>Infrastructure within the pasture is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing</p> <p>Cattle distribution is less than desired</p>

1-5.f

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Chalk Creek Allotment:</u> Allotment Wide</p>	<p>See Table 1.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p>	<p>Livestock concentrations near existing cattleguard on the BLM/FS boundary are causing resource damage.</p> <p>Livestock distribution is less than desired for the allotment.</p> <p>Maintain riparian condition.</p>

1-5.g

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<u>Chubb Allotment</u> Allotment Wide	See Table 1.	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Increase vigor and density of upland grasses.</p> <p>Achieve less than 30% bare ground.</p> <p>Increase woody riparian shrubs</p>	<p>Ungulate distribution is concentrated in low lying areas.</p> <p>Infrastructure within the allotment is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>There is no stock water available in the uplands to encourage livestock out of low lying areas.</p> <p>Hoof action is causing bank trampling, plant pedestalling in the riparian area.</p> <p>Maintain or improve riparian area.</p>

1-5.h

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<u>Fourmile Allotment:</u> Allotment Wide	See Table 1.	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Perpetuate or enhance the existing PFC.</p>	<p>Infrastructure within the allotment is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>Limited stock water available in the uplands to encourage livestock distribution and discourage livestock concentrations in the low lands and high recreation areas.</p> <p>Recreational users contribute to the difficulty of getting an efficient rotation with existing fencing.</p> <p>Recreational livestock are using forage sources in Davis Meadow and the Fourmile Area.</p> <p>There is conflict with recreational users in the Old Homestead and Fourmile area.</p> <p>Conflicts exist between recreation users and livestock on Fourmile Creek where livestock tend to drift and hang.</p> <p>Conflicts exist with private land owners and recreational users along Seven Mile Creek.</p> <p>Coordinate management with the adjacent BLM allotment to run as a single management unit.</p> <p>Maintain or improve riparian conditions.</p>

1-5.i

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Little Cochetopa Allotment:</u> Allotment Wide</p>	<p>See Table 1.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p>	<p>Cattle distribution is poor for the allotment.</p> <p>Infrastructure within the allotment is not adequate to control timing, intensity, duration and location of livestock grazing.</p> <p>Limited stock water available in the uplands to encourage livestock distribution and discourage livestock concentrations in the low lands.</p> <p>Current rotational system is not effective.</p> <p>Conflicts exist with recreation and fence construction and maintenance.</p> <p>Big game and cattle forage resource conflicts exist.</p> <p>Maintain or improve riparian conditions.</p>

1-5.j

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>McQuaid Allotment:</u> Allotment Wide</p>	<p>See Table 1.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Manage for grassland and stream/riparian desired conditions.</p> <p>Manage for grassland, upland shrub, ponderosa pine and aspen desired conditions.</p> <p>Expand extent of riparian vegetation. Improve vigor of perennial grasses and forbs.</p> <p>Manage for aspen, grassland and mesic meadow desired conditions</p>	<p>Competition for winter range between elk and livestock exists.</p> <p>Livestock distribution is less than desired for the allotment.</p> <p>Maintain or improve riparian conditions.</p>

1-5.k

Allotment	Existing Condition (see Table 1-3)	Desired Conditions (see Table 1-4)	Need for Action
<p><u>Union Allotment:</u> Allotment Wide</p>	<p>See Table 1.</p>	<p>Manage for defined DC of ecosystem communities within the allotment.</p> <p>Manage for stream/riparian, bench/transition and grassland DC. Maintain PFC.</p> <p>Decrease sagebrush density to create a mosaic of shrub age classes, interspersed with a variety of native grasses and forbs. Increase native species diversity and vigor of native grasses, forbs and shrubs.</p> <p>Increase density and diversity of naturally occurring native alpine species.</p>	<p>USFS and private land conflicts exist.</p> <p>Big game and cattle forage resource conflicts exist.</p> <p>Cattle distribution is poor for the allotment.</p> <p>Current rotational system is not effective.</p> <p>Maintain riparian conditions.</p> <p>Native species diversity and vigor less than desired and age class structure of shrub diversity less than desired</p> <p>Conflicts exist between recreation users and cattle.</p>

1.6 Scope of the Analysis

The Salida Ranger District has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to document the analysis and disclose the environmental effects of alternative management actions in the SLS geographic area, referred to as the “project area”, (Map Figure 1-1, page 2). The project area generally extends from the Continental Divide on the west, to the Buffalo Peaks Wilderness area on the north, to South Park on the east and then to the Sangre De Cristo mountains on the south. The project area includes about 338,000 acres of land managed by the Pike San Isabel National Forest.

Implementation of the selected alternative would begin with the 2007 grazing season. Upland and riparian utilization standards would be incorporated into the new AMPs and become requirements of the grazing permits. The new AMPs would guide livestock management within the project area until a periodic review of the NEPA Decision indicates that changed conditions have occurred and there is a need for an updated analysis and decision. The approval of the new or subsequent AMPs and issuance of grazing permits to reflect the selected alternative would not be subject to further NEPA documentation as long as the current NEPA analysis and decision remain current and valid. A review will be conducted and documented as a minimum each time that a term grazing permit affected by this decision comes up for issuance.

The grouping of actions in this analysis was based on their relationship in attaining the desired conditions. However, these actions could be implemented individually and are therefore, not “connected” (40 CFR 1508.25).

Three alternatives were developed in conjunction with this project. These alternatives provide a “range of reasonable” alternative actions.

- The “No Action” (No Grazing) alternative was developed and analyzed in detail.
- The “No Change” or Current Situation alternative was also developed to reflect current management. Current management is defined as that management actually applied on the allotment(s) over the past three to five years as documented in Annual Operating Instructions (AOI). This management may or may not be the same as documented in existing AMPs (where they exist) for the 14 allotments in the project area.
- The proposed action is focused on the continued authorization of livestock grazing to include the development of adaptive management actions including upland allowable use standards, riparian area allowable use and other standards, rangeland improvement practices (structural and non-structural), management systems, monitoring and feedback mechanisms to manage adaptive processes, and special management and emphasis areas.

This EA was written under the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality, Title 40, Code of Federal Regulation, Parts 1500-1508; and the National Forest Management Act, Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219. The proposal is not a general management plan for the area; general management direction is found in the PSICC LRMP (1986).

1.7 Decision Framework

Allotment Management Planning (AMP) is needed to define appropriate decisions and provide guidance to ensure that rangeland health is maintained or moving towards the desired condition. Based on this analysis, the Salida, Leadville, and South Park District Rangers will determine the appropriateness of livestock grazing, and management needed to ensure the meeting or moving toward desired condition objectives in desired timeframes.

The District Rangers are the responsible officials who will decide whether or not to continue to authorize livestock grazing on all or portions of the 14 allotments and if so, under what terms and conditions so as to meet or move toward meeting Forest Plan objectives in a timely manner.

Management on each allotment is implemented through an allotment-specific AMP based on the alternative selected in the NEPA Decision. The AMP is the implementation document by which the Forest Service communicates to the permittee and others the management objectives and planned actions to accomplish those objectives.

The allotments currently under permit in the analysis area are being operated under AMPs developed 10 to 15 years ago and are being proposed for revision.

This environmental assessment (EA) is not a decision document. This EA discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and alternatives to that action. The Forest Service decisions will be stated and explained in two or more separate Decision Notice documents.

This EA focuses on National Forest System lands administered by the Salida, Leadville, and South Park Ranger Districts. It does not evaluate livestock grazing activities on other allotments, other Ranger Districts, or other National Forests. This EA does evaluate cumulative actions associated with livestock grazing effects on both the National Forest System lands and to the degree feasible on the adjacent or associated private lands.

1.8 Public Involvement ---

A preliminary scoping letter was sent to over 50 interested parties in December 2005. This letter asked for public comments on the proposal until January 6, 2005. Six comment letters were received. The project was also identified in the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the PSICC National Forests and Grasslands starting in July of 2006. The SOPA is mailed to hundreds of individuals and groups and is also posted on the Forest website. Using comments from the public, other agencies and entities, the interdisciplinary team (IDT) developed a list of issues to address.

1.9 Key and Non-Key Issues ---

Issues were separated into key and non-key issues. Key issues were defined as an effect (or perceived effect, risk or hazard) on a physical, biological, social or economic resource caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-key issues were identified as those which were: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, LRMP or other higher level decision; 3) not relevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence.

For each key issue, one or more indicator criteria are identified. These indicators will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of each alternative in responding to the issue.

The interdisciplinary team (IDT) identified preliminary issues prior to the formal public scoping. The list identified expected concerns regarding the effects of the proposed action. Comments received after the initial scoping effort revealed several areas of social and environmental issues related to the proposed action. Key issues and their indicators are described below and can be tracked in Chapter 3.

Key Issues:

- ★ Changes in livestock management may impact the financial well-being of permittees and the local economy.
 - Indicators:
 - HMs under Term Grazing Permit
 - Number of allotments under Term Grazing Permit
 - Economic costs to permittees to implement alternatives

- ★ Livestock grazing may negatively impact natural ecosystems, especially riparian areas across the project area, through trampling, vegetation loss, reductions in water quality, and increases in erosion potential.
 - Indicators:
 - Allowable use standards met.
 - Increase or decrease riparian hardwoods
 - Increase or decrease in upland native perennial grass cover
 - Streambank alteration.
 - Increase or decrease in riparian ground cover
 - Increase or decrease in noxious weeds

- ★ Conflicts exist between livestock grazing use and recreation use on National Forests. Livestock grazing may have negative impacts on recreational activities such as hiking, biking, camping, fishing and Off-Highway-Vehicle (OHV) use. These impacts are found throughout the project area, but are especially prevalent in wilderness and around developed recreation sites. Livestock leave manure; attract flies, interrupt the quiet, disturb the view, block roads and trails, disturb fish, and eat flowers. Conflicts with livestock during the summer increase as recreation and number of recreationists in the forest increases. Recreationists and recreational activities may negatively impact livestock grazing and related operations, especially in popular and high-concentration recreation areas. Permittees report cows being chased by dogs, people on bikes, horses, ATVs and other OHVs; OHVs tearing up riparian areas and uplands; gates being left open; salt, supplement and mineral being stolen; fences being cut; and water developments being tampered with.
 - Indicators:
 - Reduced number of complaints from forest visitors or permittees
 - Livestock excluded from developed recreation sites
 - Numbers of gates replaced by cattleguards on roads and trails
 - Number of complaints about gates being left open
 - Limiting season of use for livestock grazing in certain areas
 - Amount of fence cut
 - Number of water sources damaged
 - Amount of salt/supplement/mineral stolen or tampered with
 - Acres of habitat lost to OHV misuse

1.10 Other Related Efforts within the Project Area _____

- **Hazardous fuels reduction** – As part of the National Fire Plan, the San Isabel National Forest is planning to complete several analyses to implement hazardous fuels reduction treatments within the project area. These treatments will be taking place on the McQuaid, Fourmile, Chubb Park, Bassam, Chalk Creek, and Browns Creek allotments. The treatments are expected to use a combination of thinning, slash piling, pile burning, and/or broadcast burning. These activities should be completed within 10-15 years, funding dependent. Structural range improvements such as water sources and fences will need to be protected during these treatments. Livestock rotations may need to be adjusted to accommodate these treatments. New forage areas will be opened as a result of these activities.

- **Prescribed burning** – Since the ponderosa pine ecosystem and surrounding grassland ecosystems evolved with fire, this disturbance regime is an important part of the system. The Forest Plan directs implementation of 1500 acres per year to reduce fuel loading. These types of projects will be ongoing, done both independently and in conjunction with hazardous fuels reduction projects. These treatments will be taking place on the allotments mentioned in the hazardous fuels reduction areas above. Structural range improvements such as water sources and fences will need to be protected during these treatments. Livestock rotations may need to be adjusted to accommodate these treatments. New forage areas will be opened as a result of these activities.
- **Travel management and recreational use** – The Forest Service manages for multiple uses including recreational activities. Some recreation, including OHV use, has detrimental impacts on rangeland resources through gates being left open, soil erosion, vegetation disturbance or loss, cattle being chased or shot, and improvements being tampered with. An EA will be written following completion of Forest Plan revision to analyze travel management that will address such issues as off-road vehicle use resulting in damage to upland and riparian resources. These types of issues and impacts are not discussed in this document but management decided upon through this analysis and subsequent decisions will be incorporated into and coordinated with the travel management analysis and decision(s).
- **Noxious weed treatment** – The PSICC has already analyzed the effects of noxious weed treatment across the San Isabel National Forest. That EA was published in 1998 and the resulting decision provides for implementation of an integrated weed management approach. The focus is on prevention, early control of small infestations and containment of larger populations. Integration means that weeds will be treated using a variety of techniques including chemical, physical and biological control. Weeds are treated aggressively on an annual basis on the Salida, Leadville and South Park Districts. Mapping of new infestations is on-going.