

Proposed Action for the
Flechado Livestock Grazing Allotment
 Camino Real Ranger District
 Carson National Forest
 Taos County, New Mexico

August 2008

Purpose & Need and Proposed Action

The Camino Real Ranger District, Carson National Forest, proposes to continue authorizing livestock grazing while incorporating adjustments and improvements outlined in Table 1, on the Flechado Allotment (see Figure 1). The purpose and need for revising the grazing program (i.e., authorizing a range of stocking levels, adjusting the entry date based on range readiness criteria, constructing pasture fences and spring protection fences, and proposing prescribed burning) is 1) to make forage from lands suitable for grazing available to qualified livestock operators and contribute to the social and economic well-being of affected livestock operators and their families, as well as to the economy of local communities and counties; and 2) to continue to maintain healthy ecological conditions and/or improve unsatisfactory ecological conditions on the Flechado Allotment.

Table 1 outlines the purpose and need, the actions proposed to achieve the purpose and need, and allotment management objectives.

Table 1 Purpose and Need Proposed Action

Pasture	Proposed Action	Purpose and Need	Objective
Flechado Allotment	Authorize a range of 100-131 cow/calf units and bulls to graze on the Flechado Allotment under a 6-7 pasture rotational grazing system within the season 6/1-9/30. The number of bulls would typically be between 4 and 6 (i.e. 96 c/c + 4 bulls or 125 c/c + 6 bulls). The livestock entry date/numbers would be dependent on range readiness, water availability, forage conditions, and condition of the range improvements assigned to the permittee for maintenance. Management would be with 7 pastures after a fence dividing the Osha Pasture into two is built. The Gathering Pasture and Riparian Pasture would be managed using a deferred rotation grazing system, scheduled for up to 10 days of use in a grazing season. The remaining pastures would be managed using a rest rotation grazing system, where one pasture would be rested from permitted livestock grazing each year.	Livestock grazing on National Forest System lands has contributed to the local economy and the stability of northern New Mexico communities for over a hundred years. On the Flechado Allotment, there is a need for forage availability to support domestic livestock and contribute to the economic diversity and social well being of surrounding communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood. Capacity studies have determined that the Flechado Allotment can support 131 cow/calf + bulls and achieve desired conditions and range readiness studies have determined that the allotment is often range ready by June 1 st . A realistic stocking range	<u>Make forage availability to support domestic livestock and contribute to the economic diversity and social well being of surrounding communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood</u> <u>Maintain or improve range vegetation and soil conditions.</u>

Livestock Grazing Management for the Flechado Range Allotment – Proposed Action

Pasture	Proposed Action	Purpose and Need	Objective
		is 100-131, to make adjustments for drought years.	
Osha/ Flechado Pastures	Construct a complete Osha/Flechado Pasture division fence on line (the existing portion of the fence is not on line). This would require approximately 0.75 miles of new fence construction.	There is a gap in the fence between the Flechado Pasture and the Osha Pastures in the Apache Pass Subdivision area. Cattle can get from one pasture to the other through unfenced private land between the pastures.	<u>Provide for more effective management of cattle.</u>
Flechado Pasture	Enhance riparian conditions around Apache Spring by expanding the spring protection enclosure fence, moving the existing drinker out of the drainage onto a drier site, and adding an additional drinker on the other side of the Osha/Flechado Pasture division fence. This would require approximately 0.25 miles of new fence construction.	Apache Spring is a developed spring with a drinker for livestock and wildlife. The size and condition of the spring protection fence could be improved to better protect the condition of riparian vegetation in those areas. Moving the location of the existing drinker away from the drainage to a drier site and adding an additional drinker would also help with resource protection and improved livestock distribution by providing water to both the Osha and the Flechado Pastures away from the drainage bottom.	<u>Provide for more effective protection of Apache Spring and its associated riparian vegetation and also provide for more effective management of cattle.</u>
Flechado Pasture	Move, modify, and/or “harden off” the Flechado Pasture water gaps onto the Rio Fernando or change the angle of fence leading to them.	There are two fenced water access areas (“water gaps”) allowing cattle in the Flechado Pasture to drink from the Rio Fernando. The location of these gaps or the angle of the gap fences could be improved to avoid negative riparian resource impacts.	<u>Promote streambank stability and reduce sediment entering the creek.</u>
Osha Pasture	Construct an approximately 1.5-1.75 mile fence separating the Osha Pasture into two (North Osha Pasture and South Osha Pasture) and develop a water source along the fenceline which can provide water to both pastures. Construction would be done under a cost-share agreement with the permittee.	The Osha Pasture is very large and currently parts of the pasture receive very little use by livestock. Livestock distribution and use of the forage could be improved.	<u>Provide for more effective management of cattle.</u>
Osha Pasture	Implement prescribed burning within approximately 376 acres within the Osha Pasture at a low to moderate intensity using broadcast burning and possibly hand piling and burning. Of these 376 acres: 91 acres are grassland meadows and 285 acres are within old timber sales in the following	Across the western landscape, it has been recognized that meadows and open tree canopy areas have been steadily disappearing as more dense forests have been expanding. This has, in part,	<u>Maintain/enhance meadows and forested openings to maintain or improve productivity of the herbaceous vegetation and the</u>

Livestock Grazing Management for the Flechado Range Allotment – Proposed Action

Pasture	Proposed Action	Purpose and Need	Objective
	vegetation types: 35 acres aspen; 59 acres Douglas-fir; and 191 acres. These areas all have slopes of less than 40% and are relatively open, having less than 60% canopy cover. The intent is to implement prescribed burns within meadows and openings, not within the densely forested areas. Timing of burns would occur during fall, summer or winter, with fall ignition being most likely. Riparian buffers would include 50' around seeps, springs, wetlands, and intermittent streams; 100' around perennial water.	been a result of a century of fire suppression. There are meadows and open forest areas within the Osha Pasture which support herbaceous vegetation which provides food for both livestock and numerous species of wildlife. As these areas become encroached with trees and as open forest areas become denser, reducing sunlight to the forest floor, the growth and diversity of herbaceous vegetation in these areas is often reduced.	<u>overall fire regime condition classes¹.</u>

Existing Situation

Location - The Flechado Allotment is located approximately 12 miles east of Taos and 1 mile west of Angel Fire, New Mexico on the northeastern corner of the Camino Real Ranger District. The project area lies in Taos County within portions of Township 25 North, Range 15 East, Sections 2-4, 9-11, 14-16, 21-22, 27-29, 32-34; Township 26 North, Range 15 East, Sections 33-34. New Mexico Principal Meridian. The six pastures that make up the allotment are located to the north and south of US Highway 64, “Taos Canyon”, west of the Village of Angel Fire. It can be accessed by US Highway 64, Forest Roads 5 and 70, and the Elliott Barker Trail.

Setting –The Flechado Allotment contains approximately 6,331 acres within 2 watersheds, the Upper Rio Grande River Basin and the Canadian River Basin. The elevation ranges from 8,410 ft along the eastern boundary of the Siemental Pasture to 10,170 ft along the eastern boundary of the Osha Pasture. Average annual precipitation ranges from 23 inches at the lower elevations to 31 inches at the upper elevations.

Most of the area that presently makes up the Flechado Allotment (with the exception of the Siemental Pasture) was formerly New Mexico State owned lands. Our records indicate that during that time lease and unauthorized livestock heavily grazed the Taos Canyon area with sheep, goats, cattle, horses and burros. At that time animals were brought up as soon as the snow melted, with even the steep slopes receiving high use. The area was added to the Carson National Forest in 1949 as part of the Tienditas State Exchange Lands as a “Watershed Rehabilitation Project”. Upon incorporation into the National Forest System, some timber contracts and outstanding grazing leases existed. Timber projects continued up until 1958 at which time timber rights were acquired by the Forest Service. Former state leasers were granted grazing permits. Unauthorized livestock use was basically eliminated in 1951. In 1956 the Taos Canyon Watershed Improvement project was implemented with reseedling, terracing, gully plugs and bank sloping. A 1961 report documented that at that time the stream was back to being perennial

¹ Fire Regime Condition Class is a classification of the amount current conditions have departed from those of historical reference conditions.

and small fish were being found as far up as the administrative pasture (which is currently a part of the Riparian Pasture).

The Siemental Pasture of the Flechado Allotment was acquired in 1952 from George Siemental who purchased the land from the Maxwell Land Grant Company, to keep the timber from being cut above his ranch. In contrast to the other pastures above, these were exchange lands that were not taken over by the government in an abused condition.

The allotment was combined from the Osha and La Jara Allotments in 1966. These two allotments were made up of a combination of 8 former allotments. At that time permitted numbers were 131 cow/calf pairs and the season of use was 6/16-9/30. Prior to this, different numbers were permitted and present boundaries do not conform to the same area which was involved in the former allotments. In 1976, a new allotment management plan was implemented which incorporated a four pasture grazing rotation system. In 1979, there was a slight change in the allotment with an administrative horse pasture swap with the Forest Service. Also in 1988, a fence was constructed in the Flechado Pasture, creating the Riparian Pasture and the Gathering Pasture. The Riparian Pasture was created in order to improve riparian conditions and fish habitat. The project included the fence, willow planting, and stream structures.

Current Grazing Management – There is currently one term grazing permit authorizing livestock use on the Flechado Allotment for 131 c/c for the season 6/16-9/30. The grazing system currently being used is a six-pasture rotational grazing system, which relies primarily on the four larger pastures, which include the La Jara, Siemental, Flechado and Osha Pastures. The Riparian and Gathering Pastures are used minimally at the beginning of the grazing season or later in the grazing season, typically for no more than 10 days. The current allotment entry date is June 16th. Range readiness provides for specific plant physiological needs. Range readiness criteria in six out of the last seven years has been ready prior to the permitted on date for the allotment, indicating that an acceptable entry date may be moved to earlier in the grazing season.

Management Direction

The Carson National Forest Plan (Forest Plan) identifies the National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Flechado Allotment as suitable for domestic livestock grazing. The project proposal was designed to conform to Forest Plan direction, goals, and standards and guidelines, which are incorporated by reference. The allotment includes lands within Management Areas 3 - Mixed Conifer under 40% slopes, 7 - Unsuitable Timber, and 14 - Riparian.

The original Carson National Forest Plan did not contain specific management direction for grazing in either the Forest-wide direction or in the Management Area direction. The plan was amended in 1996 to provide direction for grazing management within habitat for the northern goshawk and the Mexican spotted owl. Since that time, general grazing management direction for the rest of the Forest has been developed by the Forest Range staff based on the effects of conservative/moderate stocking on plant physiology in terms of maintaining or increasing plant vigor and productivity in the light of frequent and recurring drought conditions in the southwestern United States (Howery 1999, FSM R3-2209.13-2006-1). Conservative stocking rates, in turn, can provide a relatively reliable operation for the rancher. The current Carson NF range management guidance includes managing for:

Livestock Grazing Management for the Flechado Range Allotment – Proposed Action

- Utilization levels between 20% to 40% (dry weight) at the end of the growing season. Utilization of the annual available forage would not exceed 40%.
- 4 inches of stubble height of the annual available forage in the riparian areas after livestock grazing.
- Fair to good range condition
- Stable to upward rangeland condition trend. (Stable trend is when the upward or downward trend is not apparent)
- Satisfactory watershed/soil conditions

Resource Condition – Existing range condition for the Flechado Allotment was determined by field visits and examination of district range analysis records, which includes Parker 3-step range analysis transects.

The Parker 3-Step transects measure species composition; score vegetation rangeland condition and apparent rangeland trend; score soil condition and apparent soil trend; evaluate grass vigor; measure grass height, and record vegetation cover. Long term trend is obtained from the comparison of transects from the same location over a period of time.

Table 2 General Range Condition & Trend

Pasture	Condition	Apparent Trend
La Jara	Good	upward
Flechado	Fair/Good	stable to upward
Riparian/Gathering	Good	stable
Siemental	Fair/Good	stable
Osha	Good/Excellent	stable to upward

Table 3 Utilization Measurements by Pasture for the Past 5 Years

Pasture	Utilization% 2003	Utilization% 2004	Utilization% 2005	Utilization% 2006	Utilization% 2007
La Jara	30-40	20-40	10-30	30-40	20-40
Flechado	20-40	20-40	20-40	30-40	20-40
Riparian/Gathering	20-30	20-40	20-40	10	20-40
Siemental	0-20	20-40	20-40	20-30	20-40
Osha	20-40	10-20	20-40	10-20	0-20
Average use per year across all key use areas.	<40	<40	<40	<40	<40

* Method utilized consisted of clipping and weighing forage, utilizing cages placed in key use areas prior to livestock grazing. Ocular estimates were also employed. An average is depicted here. No measurements were taken in the pastures not being grazed but ocular estimates were used and were below the 40 percent guideline.

Decision Framework

The Camino Real District Ranger will issue a decision for the Flechado Allotment that will include a determination of the significance of the environmental effects and whether an

environmental impact statement will be prepared. The decision will also include a determination of consistency with the Forest Plan, National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and applicable laws, regulations, and executive orders.

If the Camino Real District Ranger determines it is not necessary to prepare an environmental impact statement, the District Ranger will decide whether cattle grazing will be allowed to continue on the allotment as proposed or as outlined under another alternative, including the no grazing alternative. If any alternative other than “no grazing” is selected, the decision will identify the class of livestock, number of livestock permitted, typical grazing season, general type of grazing system, utilization levels (grazing intensity), residual cover thresholds (stubble heights), range facilities, implementation schedules, and what monitoring and evaluation will be done. All of these items would be included in a new Allotment Management Plan and the new term grazing permit, which would be issued as part of the implementation of the decision.

Public Involvement

The proposed project was listed in the Carson National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions from July 2007, to the present. This list is distributed to numerous individuals and can be accessed on the Carson National Forest website and the national Forest Service website. A detailed project proposal was provided to 218 individuals, groups and agency representatives for comment during scoping in December 2007 and January 2008. Seventeen responses were received. In addition, the Forest consulted with tribal contacts for 16 tribes. Two responses were received.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and tribes, an interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address.

Issues

Comments received during scoping and the 30 day comment period were examined for significant issues. The Forest Service separates the issues into two groups: significant issues and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require the following delineation in Sec. 1501.7, “...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)...”

Among the topics raised during scoping, the Forest Service identified the following significant issues:

Significant Issue #1: Livestock grazing could negatively affect water quality in the Rio Fernando and Apache Canyon by contributing e-coli bacteria to the water way. E. coli sampling results from 2006 and 2007 by the NM Environment indicate full support of the secondary contact standard. Limiting grazing in the Riparian and Gathering Pastures to approximately 10 days per

season has been effective at improving the vegetative cover in these pastures over the past 20 years. Good vegetative cover helps maintain water quality. Impacts to water quality will be the measure of this effect.

Significant Issue #2: Private fence conditions along the eastern Forest Boundary could negatively affect livestock management on the allotment and create private land/cattle conflicts when the allotment is stocked. The District is working cooperatively with the Village of Angel Fire, the permittee, the RMYC, and is attempting to work with the private land owners to establish and maintain a cow-tight fence while cattle are using the pastures. This should alleviate many of the problems experienced in recent years. The ability of the permittee to keep cattle within the allotment boundary will be the measure of this effect.

Significant Issue #3: Prescribed burning poses a risk of escape – Mitigation measures to minimize this risk are identified in a burn plan. This would be developed prior to any implementation. It would identify the resources needed and the parameters under which the burn would be conducted to achieve resource goals and to reduce risk of escape.

Significant Issue #4: Riparian communities and water quality conditions may be negatively impacted by livestock grazing. Proposed grazing guidelines of 40% utilization, 4” stubble heights, following rotational grazing systems, and salting away from waters would help protect the riparian community and the water quality of adjacent streams. Effects to riparian communities will be the indicator of this effect.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section describes and compares the alternatives considered for management of the Flechado Allotment. This section presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker. This section also identifies mitigation measures.

Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study

Current Permitted Management:

This alternative would authorize grazing as it is currently permitted, with no new improvements or changes in numbers of livestock permitted or season of use.

The IDT discussed that current management of the allotment is working generally well, although it is necessary to fully integrate all of the pastures into the rotational grazing system in order for resource goals to be achieved. The proposed fence infrastructure changes are necessary to fully implement the current management scheme effectively. Without those improvements, it would be difficult to achieve resource goals, thus it is not a viable alternative.

A “current management” alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Single Class of Livestock:

An alternative was suggested which would authorize use by only cow-calf units; no bulls.

The IDT discussed that in cow/calf operations, it is standard operating practice to allow a fraction of the permitted numbers to be filled with bulls, in order to allow for breeding of the next year's calf crop. Some operations have a very set breeding schedule, in which case bulls may be removed after a certain date. Other operations leave them in for the grazing season. In order to alleviate concerns over the number of bulls to be allowed, the proposed action identifies the general number of bulls that would be allowed.

A "single class of livestock" alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Fence out Apache Canyon:

An alternative was suggested which would leave the Osha/Flechado boundary in its present location and add a fence from the NE corner of the Apache Canyon subdivision running east to the forest boundary, which would create a new pasture between those two fences, which includes the power lines. This action was suggested by an individual for the purpose of excluding cattle from the riparian areas in upper Apache Canyon to remove any livestock impacts to that area, and to "dedicate that area to non-vehicular recreational use and water quality restoration."

The IDT determined that it is out of the scope of this analysis to designate any recreational use emphasis areas. All current recreational activities would be allowed to continue under either of the alternatives.

The IDT also discussed that the proposed action of removing the drinker in upper Apache Canyon out of the wet riparian zone onto drier ground and constructing an effective pasture boundary fence, which would allow the rotational grazing system to be followed, would achieve the desired resource objectives.

Since the proposed action addresses the resource concerns without removing a large portion of the pasture from use and with a smaller amount of new fence construction (.75 miles vs. 1.3 miles), a "fence out Apache Canyon" alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Eliminate livestock use in the Gathering Pasture and Riparian Pasture:

An alternative was suggested which would eliminate use of the Gathering Pasture and the Riparian Pasture by permitted livestock to address water quality concerns.

The IDT acknowledged that livestock grazing is a potential contributor to e-coli in nearby or downstream waterways. However, it is neither the sole contributor nor can it be determined what percentage of a contributor it is. Wildlife, recreationists, and septic tanks from nearby or upstream homeowners are also potential contributors in the vicinity of the Gathering Pasture and the Riparian Pasture. The IDT discussed that limiting the livestock grazing in these two pastures to approximately 10 days per season has been effective at improving the vegetative cover in these pastures over the past 20 years. Good vegetative cover helps to maintain water quality by filtering runoff of such things as sediment and feces, which helps reduce sedimentation into the creek and reduces e-coli contamination.

The NM Environment Department sampled E. coli in Rio Fernando de Taos and Apache Canyon Creek, to assess the secondary contact standard, within the Flechado Allotment in 2006. Results of the sampling indicated full support of the secondary contact standard. E. coli sampling results from 2007 also indicated full support of the secondary standard (2507 cfu/100mL) within the Flechado Allotment.

Since the practice of limiting grazing to 10 days per season has been effective at maintaining vegetative cover resource goals, an “eliminate livestock use in the Gathering Pasture and Riparian Pasture” alternative was eliminated from detailed study. In addition, the No Action alternative will analyze the effects of eliminating livestock grazing from these two pastures.

No New Structural Improvements Alternative:

An alternative was suggested which would not propose any new structural improvements which rely on efforts by the permittee for maintenance, due to an impression that the current improvements are not currently maintained sufficiently.

District records document compliance with maintenance responsibilities by the permittee. They also document difficulties the permittee has managing livestock with situations that are out of his control, such as gates being left open, fences being cut, and private land fencelines that are inadequate.

It is typical to cost share with permittees for the construction of new improvements and assign them to the permittee for maintenance if they are needed for livestock management purposes. New improvements are needed to achieve resource goals on the Flechado Allotment. For these reasons, a “No New Structural Improvements” alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

No Early Extension of the Grazing Season:

An alternative was suggested that would keep the “on date” for livestock at June 16th.

The IDT discussed that in four out of the last five years, the allotment has been “range ready” earlier than June 16th. Range readiness is defined by the Society for Range Management as “a defined stage of plant growth at which grazing may begin under a specific management plan without permanent damage to vegetation or soils.” Under the proposed action, range readiness would be used as the guideline to determine the appropriate time to allow livestock to enter a pasture. If the plant phenology has not developed to the stage allowed by range readiness guidelines before any given date (June 1-16), livestock entry would be delayed until the guidelines have been.

Capacity estimates for the Flechado allotment show that it has more forage available to be allocated for livestock than the proposal would allocate.

Prohibit Prescribed Fire:

This alternative was proposed by one individual who requested that we not consider any prescribed fire due to the proximity to Angel Fire, feeling that many residents would be opposed. The IDT discussed that we received numerous letters of support for the prescribed burning from residents of Angel Fire, including the mayor and some councilmen, who supported it in anticipation that it would help protect Angel Fire from future wildfires.

Before any prescribed fire would be implemented, a burn plan would be developed, which would identify the resources needed and the parameters under which the burn would be conducted to achieve resource goals and to reduce risk of escape.

The effects of this alternative will be analyzed under Alternative A – No Action/No Grazing. It would not meet the objective to maintain/enhance meadows and forested openings to maintain or improve productivity of the herbaceous vegetation and the overall fire regime condition classes. For this reason, it will not be analyzed in a separate alternative.

Rest Rotation Grazing System:

NMDG&F suggested that a rest rotation grazing system be implemented. The IDT discussed that this is what is typically implemented on the allotment. If the proposed action is selected, it would be even more feasible to implement, with the construction of needed fences and the addition of another pasture (splitting of Osha Pasture) to make the management strategy more flexible. The proposed action states the management system as a 6-7 pasture rotation system, which is more flexible and allows for either deferred rotation or rest rotation to be implemented from one year to the next in response to resource conditions and management needs. Since it is a strong part of the proposed action, the IDT felt a rest rotation alternative would not be significantly different in effects from the proposed action.

Complete the Taos Canyon Riparian Project:

NMDG&F suggested management to complete the Taos Canyon Riparian Project monitoring and maintenance within the current cattle/wildlife exclosure. This exclosure and the associated monitoring is somewhat out of the scope of this project, as acres currently grazed by the permitted livestock would not be affected. However, it should be noted that the existing exclosure will be modified to allow a portion of it to be accessible to elk in order to compare effects between an elk/cattle exclosure and a cattle only exclosure. This will be done separately, not as part of any specific alternative, in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

Reconstruct a fence along the eastern Forest Boundary:

An alternative was suggested in which the Forest Service and the grazing permittee would reconstruct and maintain portions of the eastern forest boundary. The condition of private land fences along the private boundary with National Forest range from being cow-tight in some places, to poor, to being nonexistent. Many of the adjacent landowners are non-residents.

New Mexico is a “fence out” state per Article 16 of Chapter 77 [NMSA 1978]. This means that private land owners are required by State law to construct adequate fencing to keep livestock off of their property if they do not want them there. It is not Carson National Forest policy to construct fences along forest boundaries. The IDT discussed that being able to control livestock movement within the allotment boundary is critical to achieving desired resource conditions within the allotment.

In the past year, the Rocky Mountain Youth Corp (RMYC) secured a National Forest Foundation grant, the purpose of which is forest restoration, to promote forest health, and to minimize conflict between private land owners and activities permitted on National Forest System lands.

They began implementing this grant in the spring of 2008, using a portion of the grant to work on the eastern forest boundary fence. In addition, the District is working cooperatively with the Village of Angel Fire, the permittee, the RMYC, and is attempting to work with the private land owners to establish and maintain a cow-tight fence while cattle are using the pastures. This should alleviate many of the problems experienced in recent years.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative A – No Action/No Grazing

Under the No Action/No Grazing Alternative, domestic livestock grazing would not be a permitted activity on the allotment. The existing term grazing permit would be cancelled. The current permittee would no longer maintain existing range improvements currently assigned to him (fences, spring developments, cattle guards, stock tanks, and corral).

Alternative B – Proposed Action

Livestock grazing would continue to be authorized on the Flechado Allotment, with some modifications, as follows:

- Authorize a range of 100-131 cow/calf units and bulls to graze on the Flechado Allotment under a 6-7 pasture rotational grazing system within the season 6/1-9/30. The number of bulls would typically be between 4 and 6 (i.e. 96 c/c + 4 bulls or 125 c/c + 6 bulls). The livestock numbers/entry date would be dependent on range readiness, water availability, forage conditions, and condition of the range improvements assigned to the permittee for maintenance. Management would be with 7 pastures after a fence dividing the Osha Pasture into two is built. The Gathering Pasture and Riparian Pasture would be managed using a deferred rotation grazing system, scheduled for up to 10 days of use in a grazing season. The remaining pastures would be managed using a rest rotation grazing system, where one pasture would be rested from permitted livestock grazing each year.
- Construct a fence separating the Osha Pasture into two (North Osha Pasture and South Osha Pasture) and develop a water source along the fenceline which can provide water to both pastures.
- Enhance riparian conditions around Apache Spring by expanding the spring protection enclosure fence, moving the existing drinker out of the drainage onto a drier site, and adding an additional drinker on the other side of the Osha/Flechado Pasture division fence.
- Construct a complete Osha/Flechado Pasture division fence on line (the existing portion of the fence is not on line).
- Move, modify, and/or “harden off” the Flechado Pasture water gaps onto the Rio Fernando.
- Implement prescribed burning within approximately 376 acres within the Osha Pasture at low to moderate intensity using broadcast burning and possibly hand piling and burning to maintain/enhance meadows and forested openings, primarily within old timber sales, to maintain or improve productivity of the herbaceous vegetation and the overall fire regime

condition classes. The areas proposed for prescribed burning within the Flechado Allotment include approximately 91 acres of grassland meadows and 285 acres within old timber sales in the following vegetation types: 35 acres aspen; 59 acres Douglas fir; and 191 acres spruce/fir. These areas all have slopes of less than 40% and are relatively open, having less than 60% canopy cover. The intent is to implement prescribed burns within meadows and openings, not within the densely forested areas or to change forest stand structure. Timing of burns would occur during fall, summer or winter, with fall ignition being most likely. Riparian buffers would include 50' around seeps, springs, wetlands, and intermittent streams; 100' around perennial water.

Mitigation and Monitoring

Mitigation Measures

To mitigate resource impacts, the following measures would be implemented under action alternatives. The mitigation measures included here are limited to those for which the Forest Service has authority. These mitigation measures have been used on previous projects and are considered to be effective in reducing environmental impacts. With full implementation of applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines, project design criteria, and the prescribed mitigation measures, no potentially significant adverse environmental affects would be expected to occur.

Soil, Water and Vegetation – the objective is to safeguard water and soil resources under sustained forage production; manage sustained forage production and forage utilization by livestock while maintaining healthy ecosystems for all resource objectives. (Best Management Practices FSH 2509.22, Chapter 20, Range Management)

Control livestock numbers and season of use (i.e. evaluate range readiness, assure only permitted livestock enter the allotment, monitor grazing utilization, assess soil and vegetation condition and trend).

Control livestock distribution (i.e. salting, riding, existing fences and watering facilities).

Heritage Resources – the objective is to protect heritage resources (archaeological sites) from direct or indirect impacts caused by ground disturbing activities associated with the construction of range facilities.

If any unrecorded sites are discovered during the course of project implementation, all project activities in the vicinity of the site(s) would cease and the District or Forest Archaeologist would be notified. Project would be modified or relocated to avoid impacts to cultural resource sites.

Monitoring

Implementation monitoring would include periodic inspections to ensure compliance with term grazing permit terms and conditions. For example, range readiness would be monitored before the grazing season begins, stubble heights may be measured during the grazing season and utilization would be monitored at the end of the season. Effectiveness monitoring would determine if grazing standards and guidelines, grazing prescriptions, and Allotment Management Plan practices are effective in accomplishing the planned objectives. For example, vegetation condition and trend would be monitored at approximately ten-year intervals.

Comparison of Alternatives

Table 4 Comparison of Alternatives

Item	Alternative A No Action/No Grazing	Alternative B Proposed Action
Permitted Livestock	None	100-131 cow/calf units and bulls
Season of Use	None	6/1-9/30
Grazing Management	N/A	6-7 pasture rotational
New Improvements	None	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. North Osha/South Osha Pasture division fence 2. Apache Spring spring protection exlosure fence expansion + new drinker 3. Flechado/Osha Pasture division fence completion 4. Flechado Pasture water gap improvements 5. Approximately 376 acres prescribed fire in 91 acres of grassland meadows and 285 acres within old timber sales

Figure 1. Map of the Flechado grazing allotment and pastures.

