

Decision Memo

Angell Grazing Allotment Management Plan

USDA Forest Service Peaks Ranger District, Coconino National Forest Coconino County, Arizona

Background

The Angell Allotment (see Map 1) is on the Peaks Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest. Current permitted use for the Angell Allotment is 425 head of cow/calf pairs (3,135 AUM), from May 15 through October 31. The Angell Allotment consists of approximately 51,696 acres, divided into 11 pastures (see Map 2). These pastures include: Rattlesnake, South Angell, Railroad, Winona, Turkey Tanks, O'Neil, Cinder Hills, Cochrane, Maroon, Crisp and Rio de Flag. The allotment boundary begins approximately 3 miles east of the City of Flagstaff and runs east to the Forest boundary. This allotment is located within all or portions of T22N, R10E Sections 4-9, 16-21, and 31-33, T21N, R10E Sections 4-10 and 13-35, T20N R10E Sections 2-11, T22N, R9E Sections 13,14, and 20-36, and T21N R9E Sections 1-5, 9-14, and 24.

The permitted use is based on condition and trend studies completed in 2001 and revisited in 2006, actual use data for the allotment for the past 17 years and the effects of this use on resource conditions. It also reflects the estimated annual forage production available for cattle on the allotment considering climate, duration, timing, frequency, and intensity of grazing proposed as well as proper livestock management.

Grassland, juniper and ponderosa pine dominate the vegetation on the Angell Allotment at an elevation ranging from 5,700 to 7,000 feet. The allotment consists primarily of juniper and grassland, which varies from open grassland to dense juniper. Ponderosa pine exists in the northwest corner of the allotment and in canyon pine stringers. Since 2000, many of the pinyon trees on the Angell Allotment have died as a result of drought. This has allowed grass and forb understory species to increase where these trees have died.

Decision

I have decided to reauthorize grazing for up to 425 cattle (cow/calf) from May 15 through October 31 (3,135 AUM) on the Angell Range Allotment. The authorization will be through a term grazing permit.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under Section 339 of the FY 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447). The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because this action meets the provisions outlined in the Appropriations Act as follows:

- 1) The decision continues current grazing management:
 - My decision continues current livestock numbers and grazing management, as described in the "Background" section of this Decision Memo.

2) Monitoring indicates that current grazing management is meeting, or satisfactorily moving toward, objectives in the land and resource management plan, as determined by the Secretary:

- Based on the following resource narratives and the project record (which includes monitoring information), I find my decision is consistent with the Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Coconino Forest Plan) 1987, as amended (PRD 27). The Angell Allotment includes the following Management Areas (MA): MA 7 Pinyon-Juniper Woodland Less Than 40% Slopes, MA 10 Grassland and Sparse Pinyon-Juniper above the Rim, and the Flagstaff/Lake Mary Ecosystem Analysis (FLEA) Area.

- Range

Current permitted cattle numbers, under the current grazing management system, fall within the carrying capacity of the allotment. Carrying capacity for this analysis is based on: actual use data, condition and trend monitoring, cattle and wildlife use patterns, cattle health and condition, soil surveys (Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey), forage production estimates, and professional opinion (PRD 18).

The overall trend for this allotment is static to upward. Increases in juniper and ponderosa pine on some portions of the allotment are slowing an improvement in trend. Impacts from historic uses by cattle and elk, poorly located roads, flooding during snowmelt, and heavy thunderstorms may also slow improvements in trend (PRD 18).

Since 18 monitoring plots were established on the Angell Allotment in 1956 and 1957, range trends within the juniper and grassland communities on the allotment have varied. Throughout the grassland communities, trends have gone upward on five plots, static to upward on five plots, static on three plots, static to downward on three plots, and downward on two plots. Trends on the juniper plots have gone upward on three plots, static to upward on four plots, static on one plot, static to downward on two plots, and downward on two plots. Juniper trees are encroaching into these areas which is the reason for the downward trends. As tree density increases, grass, forb and shrub production declines (PRD 18).

Unsatisfactory rangeland status within the valley plains may be a result of one or more of the following events or activities: historic grazing by cattle and wildlife; prairie dogs; settlement-era human disturbances of growing crops and cutting hay; historic intense fires; driving vehicles cross-country; and other various recreational uses (PRD 18).

These range condition trends exist under the current cattle grazing system and within the current utilization guideline for cattle and wildlife. Grazing has remained within this utilization guideline and cattle have been able to use the area for the full length of the grazing season (PRD 18).

In some of the juniper-forested areas, tree densities are increasing enough to increase bare soil and reduce ground cover by out-competing understory vegetation for water. Cattle do not typically graze the densely treed areas due to little forage availability, so the effect of cattle grazing to these areas is minimal (PRD 18).

Of the 51,696 acres on the Angell Allotment, approximately 44,120 acres have satisfactory rangeland management status and a mid to high-similarity to the desired natural community with static to upward trends. Cattle currently graze a large portion of these satisfactory acres. Approximately 7,701 acres have unsatisfactory rangeland management status and a low-similarity

to the desired natural community with primarily static but some downward trends. Unsatisfactory rangeland management status acres include impaired soils in dense juniper stands and valley plains. Of these acres, approximately 7,585 acres are solely affected by juniper and have trends that range from downward to upward. The remaining 116 acres of impaired soils are affected by cattle and have static to upward trends (PRD 18).

Soil condition status is obtained from the Coconino National Forest Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey (TES) (USDA 1995). Based on TES predictions and field surveys, satisfactory and impaired soils exist on portions of the Angell Allotment. Of 51,696 acres on the allotment, 43,481 acres are in satisfactory range condition (84%); 7,701 acres are impaired (15%); and 0 acres are unsatisfactory (0%). Cattle are directly contributing to approximately 116 acres of impaired soil conditions (0.2%). Juniper trees are directly contributing to 7,585 acres of impaired and unsatisfactory soil conditions (15%). Based upon this information, Forest Service lands on the Angell Allotment are generally considered to be in satisfactory condition (PRD 18).

Existing condition information outlined above indicates rangeland conditions on the allotment are being maintained or improved with the current cattle grazing management in place. Continued monitoring will help managers to evaluate the status of maintaining and improving rangeland conditions (PRD 18).

- Wildlife

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Findings:

xx No effect to species or its habitat (PRD 15).

This determination is made based on the fact that the project will not alter or impact habitat conditions, nor will it create a disturbance to threatened and endangered species of concern on the District's Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species List (PRD 14 and 15).

The project "may impact individuals of Sunset Crater beardtongue, but is not likely to result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability". All other sensitive species will not be affected (PRD 14 and 15).

The proposed action is not expected to affect the habitat for any MIS species based on current habitat trends and a 35% utilization level. Although, approximately 7,701 acres of pinyon-juniper have unsatisfactory rangeland management status, approximately 7,585 of these acres are primarily affected by dense stands of juniper and only 116 acres, or 0.3 % of the pinyon-juniper acres are directly affected by cattle. Therefore; implementation of the proposed action will not change the current habitat or population trend for MIS at the appropriate scale, which is the Forest (PRD 12).

No Important Birding Areas (IBA) are present. Over-wintering areas are present and over-wintering by species occurs in the project area; however no areas have been designated as important over-wintering areas in the project area. Actions proposed in this project are not expected to cause a downward trend in any of the above listed migratory bird species toward federal listing as threatened or endangered (PRD 13).

3) There are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. I considered the following resource conditions in determining whether extraordinary

circumstances related to the proposed action warranted further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS:

- Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat: There are no threatened or endangered species or critical habitat within the project area (PRD 14 and 15).
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: There are no flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds in the project area.
- Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas: There are no congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas in or near the project area.
- Inventoried roadless areas: There are no inventoried roadless areas in the project area.
- Research Natural Areas: There are no Research Natural Areas in this project area.
- Native American areas of traditional cultural importance, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas: 13 Native American tribes have been consulted on this project and none of them have expressed concern to date. An archeological survey and clearance report was completed for this project and no effects to archeological resources or sites are anticipated. (PRD 2 and 28).

The project record files, located at the Peaks Ranger District, contain further documentation supporting the findings of no extraordinary circumstances.

Design Features

Management

- The current utilization¹ guideline will continue to allow up to 35 percent use by cattle and/or wildlife during the cattle grazing season of May through October. This includes a “moderate” seasonal utilization guideline which is measured before the end of the growing season and is used when determining cattle need to move. Cattle will move from one area to another when seasonal utilization approaches a “moderate” level, approximately 21-50 percent. Pastures will not be grazed again during the grazing season. Once this use standard is met across the allotment, cattle will be moved off the allotment.
- To ensure the 116 acres of impaired soils continue to improve, salting will not be allowed in this area and herding will be used to reduce utilization. These specific cattle management procedures will be incorporated into the Annual Operating Instructions.

Adaptive Management

¹ Utilization is the proportion or degree of current year’s forage production that is consumed or destroyed by animals (including insects). It is a comparison of the amount of herbage left compared with the amount of herbage produced during the year. Utilization is measured at the end of the growing season when the total annual production can be accounted for, and the effects of grazing in the whole management unit can be assessed. Utilization guidelines are intended to indicate a level of use or desired stocking rate to be achieved over a period of years.

- The reauthorization includes the continued use of adaptive management, which provides more flexibility for managing cattle. Adaptive management allows the Forest Service to adjust the timing and duration of grazing, movement of cattle within the allotment, and cattle numbers. If adjustments are needed, they are implemented through the Annual Operating Instructions, which will adjust numbers so cattle use is consistent with current productivity. This allows plant, soil, and watershed conditions to be maintained or improved while range improvements are implemented over time. An example of a situation that could call for adaptive management adjustments is drought conditions.
- Adaptive management is designed to provide sufficient flexibility to adapt management to changing circumstances. If monitoring indicates that desired conditions are not being achieved, management will be modified in cooperation with the permittee. Changes may include administrative decisions such as the specific number of livestock authorized annually, specific dates of grazing, class of animal or modifications in pasture rotations, but such change will not exceed the limits for timing, intensity, duration, and frequency defined in this Proposed Action.

Monitoring

The type and frequency for monitoring the Angell Allotment will include:

- permittee compliance, allotment inspections, range readiness, forage production, rangeland utilization - annually
- condition and trend - every five to ten years
- frequency and canopy cover plots and a soil condition rating will be continued at long-term monitoring sites throughout the allotment - every five to ten years
- A monitoring plot will be established within the 116 acres of impaired soils currently affected by cattle. Forage production, frequency, canopy cover and photo points will be monitored annually to determine if the soils are improving with specific cattle management such as longer deferment, rest herding and no salting in this specific area.

Public Involvement

This project has been listed in the Coconino National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since April 2004. Thirteen Native American tribes have also been consulted with on this project since August 2004. On May 22, 2006, a detailed Proposed Action was mailed to five interested individuals and groups for a 30-day scoping period. One comment was received in response to this public scoping.

Findings Required by Other Laws

In addition to meeting Coconino Forest Plan standards and guidelines, this project is also consistent with the following:

- Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands (Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976).
- Forest Service policy on rangeland management (FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1).

- Federal regulation (36 CFR 222.2 (c)) which states that National Forest System lands will be allocated for livestock grazing and these allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans, and the Clean Water Act of 1948, Clean Air Act of 1955, Endangered Species Act of 1973, and 13186 (Conservation of Migratory Birds), and National Historic Preservation Act 1966, as amended.
- Authorization of livestock grazing permits for a ten-year period is required by law (FLPMA Sec. 402 (a)&(b) (3) and 36 CFR 222.3), unless there is pending disposal, or it will be devoted to other uses prior to the end of ten years, or it will be in best interest of sound land management to specify a shorter term.

Implementation Date

This project can be implemented immediately following the decision date. The decision may be implemented during the permittee appeal period, unless the Reviewing Officer grants a stay under 251.91.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal under 36 CFR 215. The Angell Allotment permittee may appeal the decision under 36 CFR 251. A Notice of Appeal must be consistent with 36 CFR 251.90 and filed simultaneously with Nora Rasure Appeal Deciding Officer and Peaks District Ranger, Gene Waldrip, within 45 days from the date of the decision.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning my decision, please contact Team Leader Katherine Sánchez Meador, Range Specialist for the Peaks and Mormon Lake Districts at (928) 526-0866.

/s/ Gene Waldrip

7/25/2006

Gene Waldrip
District Ranger

Date