PROPOSED ACTION: GRAZING MANAGEMENT FOR THE CASNER PARK/KELLY SEEP GRAZING ALLOTMENT – AUGUST, 2008

Introduction

The Peaks Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest is proposing to re-authorize cattle grazing on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment (see Map 1). The Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment north boundary begins approximately 6 miles south from Flagstaff, AZ on Interstate Highway 17. This allotment is located within all or portions of: T18N-R7E-Sec. 1-3, 11-14, 21-28; T18N-R8E-Sec. 5-8, 17-21, 29, 30; T19N-R6E-1, 2, 11, 12, 14; T19N-R7E-Sec. 2-9, 15-17, 20-23, 25-29, 33-36; T19N-R8E-Sec. 30, 31; T20N-R6E-Sec. 23-26, 35, 36; and T20N-R7E-Sec. 20, 21, 26-35.

The Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment consists of approximately 28,980 acres (see Map 1). It includes ten pastures: Pumphouse, Mountainaire, Kelly, East Kelly, Saginaw, Coulter, Cowboy, Little Horse, Casner Park, and Odel. Approximately 3,334 acres are in private ownership. The current permit on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment allows 395 head of yearling cattle from June 1 through October 31; this equates to 1,987 head months (HM) or 1,391 animal units months (AUM's).

Ponderosa pine, Arizona fescue, mountain muhly, and blue grama are the dominate vegetation types on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment. Allotment elevation ranges from 6,600 to 7,200 feet. The ponderosa pine and grassland vegetation types vary from open grassland to dense trees. The allotment lies on either side of Interstate 17; south of Kachina Village and Mountainaire; north of Munds Park; to Coulter Mountain on the east. The major canyons running through the allotment include Kelly Canyon, James Canyon, and Pumphouse Wash. Kelly and James Canyon riparian vegetation is not accessible to livestock because of steep walled canyons. Pumphouse Wash is within a riparian exclosure. No other riparian vegetation exists on the allotment.

Existing, and Desired Conditions

Permitted grazing rates on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment have varied over the last 18 years (Table 1) and overall, management has changed little during this time.

Annual authorized livestock numbers have been variable, primarily in response to drought conditions and/or suppressed forage production. For example, during the last ten years livestock grazing did not occur on the allotment in 3 of the 10 years (1998, 2001, 2002); livestock grazing occurred at a level below the permitted livestock numbers in 5 of the 10 years (1999, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005 – average 42% fewer AUM's); and livestock grazing occurred at the permitted livestock numbers in 2 of the 10 years (2006, 2007).

Table 1. Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment actual use statistics from 1990 to 2007.

Year Grazed	# of Livestock	Dates	Head Months	AUM's
1990	265Y	6/24-10/20	1,037	726
	21C	6/30-10/20	78	78
Total 1990			**1,115**	**804**
1991	272Y	6/1-10/15	**1,225**	**857**
1992	170Y	6/1-6/15	84	59
	240Y	6/16-10/15	963	674
	10C	6/1-10/15	45	45
Total 1992			**1,092**	**778**
1993	208Y	5/19-6/16	198	139
	340Y	6/17-10/20	1,408	986
Total 1993			**1,606**	**1,125**

Year Grazed	# of Livestock	Dates	Head Months	AUM's
1994	300Y	6/1-6/15	148	104
	10C	6/1-6/15	5	5
	360Y	6/16-10/21	1,515	1,060
	14C	6/16-9/9	40	40
Total 1994			**1,708**	**1,209**
1995	260Y	6/1-10/20	1,214	850
	98C	6/1-10/20	457	457
Total 1995			**1,671**	**1,307**
1996	92Y	5/23-10/18	451	315
	215C	5/23-10/18	1,053	1,053
Total 1996			**1,504**	**1,368**
1997	355Y	6/1-10/31	**1,786**	**1,250**
1998	0	0	**0**	**0**
1999	305Y	6/10-10/9	**1,223**	**856**
2000	265Y	6/15-9/15	**810**	**567**
2001	0	0	**0**	**0**
2002	0	0	**0**	**0**
2003	250Y	6/1-10/1	**1,011**	**708**
2004	425Y	6/1-6/21	293	205
	424Y	6/22-7/23	446	312
	422Y	9/7-9/14	111	78
	422Y	10/15-10/31	236	165
Total 2004			**1,086**	**760**
2005	376Y	6/1-10/8	**1,607**	**1,125**
2006	395Y	6/1-10/31	**1,987**	**1,391**
2007	395Y	6/1-10/31	**1,987**	**1,391**

Y = Yearling Cattle C = Adult Cattle

For the last 10 years, utilization has been below the 35 percent guideline established for this allotment. Table 2 displays the average pasture use recorded at the end of growing season from 1998 to 2007.

Table 2. Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment End of Season Utilization from 1998 to 2007

Year	Pasture	End of Season Utilization	Year	Pasture	End of Season Utilization
1998	East Kelly/Shipping	0	**2003**	East Kelly/Shipping	0
	Mountainaire	0		Mountainaire	0
	Saginaw	0		Saginaw	0
	Coulter	0		Coulter	25
	Cowboy	0		Cowboy	35
	Little Horse	0		Little Horse	30
	Odell	0		Odell	0
	Casner Park	0		Casner Park	0
	Pumphouse	0		Pumphouse	0
	Kelly	0		Kelly	0
1999	East Kelly/Shipping	15	**2004**	East Kelly/Shipping	11
	Mountainaire	0		Mountainaire	12

1999	Saginaw	5	**2004**	Saginaw	22
	Coulter	30		Coulter	21
	Cowboy	35		Cowboy	0
	Little Horse	30		Little Horse	21
	Odell	0		Odell	0
	Casner Park	30		Casner Park	21
	Pumphouse	0		Pumphouse	0
	Kelly	0		Kelly	11
2000	East Kelly/Shipping	30	**2005**	East Kelly/Shipping	0
	Mountainaire	35		Mountainaire	0
	Saginaw	30		Saginaw	0
	Coulter	30		Coulter	15
	Cowboy	15		Cowboy	30
	Little Horse	0		Little Horse	35
	Odell	0		Odell	35
	Casner Park	15		Casner Park	30
	Pumphouse	0		Pumphouse	0
	Kelly	0		Kelly	0
2001	East Kelly/Shipping	0	**2006**	East Kelly/Shipping	0
	Mountainaire	0		Mountainaire	5
	Saginaw	0		Saginaw	20
	Coulter	0		Coulter	35
	Cowboy	0		Cowboy	30
	Little Horse	0		Little Horse	0
	Odell	0		Odell	20
	Casner Park	0		Casner Park	25
	Pumphouse	0		Pumphouse	0
	Kelly	0		Kelly	0
2002	East Kelly/Shipping	0	**2007**	East Kelly/Shipping	0
	Mountainaire	0		Mountainaire	0
	Saginaw	0		Saginaw	0
	Coulter	0		Coulter	30
	Cowboy	0		Cowboy	35
	Little Horse	0		Little Horse	30
	Odell	0		Odell	30
	Casner Park	0		Casner Park	30
	Pumphouse	0		Pumphouse	0
	Kelly	0		Kelly	0

Permitted cattle numbers, under the current grazing management system, fall within the carrying capacity of the allotment. Carrying capacity is based on; actual use data, cattle and wildlife use patterns, cattle health and condition, condition and trend surveys, soil surveys, forage production estimates, and professional judgment.

Since seven plots were established in 1956, range condition and trends within this area have been static to upward. Increases in ponderosa pine, pinyon, and juniper on some portions of the allotment are slowing this trend. Impacts from historic uses by cattle and elk in some areas, poorly located roads, flooding during snowmelt and heavy thunderstorms may also slow improvements in trend.

These range condition trends exist under the current cattle grazing system with the current utilization guideline of 35 percent for cattle and elk. Grazing has remained within this utilization guideline and

cattle have been able to fully use the allotment for the full length of the grazing season. Early moves or skipping areas has not been routinely needed under the current grazing system and has only occurred on occasion, mainly related to drought conditions.

Of the 28,980 acres on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment, all 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.

Soil condition status is obtained from the Coconino National Forest Terrestrial Ecosystems Survey (TES) (USDA 1995). Approximately 96% of the soils within the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment are rated as satisfactory; 4% are rated as impaired. Based upon this information, Forest Service System lands on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment are considered to be in overall satisfactory condition.

Purpose and Need

The Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment is scheduled for an environmental analysis of grazing use on the Coconino National Forest, as required by the Burns Amendment (1995). This analysis is required in order to ensure that cattle grazing is consistent with goals, objectives, and the standards and guidelines of the Coconino National Forest Plan (1987, as amended).

The purpose of this project is to re-authorize cattle grazing on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment and to ensure the allotment is managed in a manner that maintains and/or moves the area toward Forest Plan objectives and desired conditions. Existing condition information outlined above indicates desired rangeland conditions on the allotment are being maintained under the current cattle grazing allotment management plan (AMP). Continued monitoring will help managers evaluate the status of maintaining and improving rangeland condition.

Proposed Action

A Proposed Action has been developed to meet the project's purpose and need. The Proposed Action would continue current grazing management by issuing a new grazing permit and continuing adaptive management and monitoring.

Authorization

The Peaks Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest specifically proposes the following:

- Reauthorize grazing on the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment for 395 head of yearling cattle from June 1 through October 31 (1,391 AUM's). The authorization would be through a term grazing permit.
- The proposed permitted use is based on condition and trend studies completed in 1999 and 2007, actual use data for the allotments for the past 10 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, grazing period, grazing occurrence, timing, frequency, and intensity of grazing proposed as well as proper livestock management.
- The current utilization[1] guideline would continue to allow up to 35 percent use by cattle and/or wildlife for the cattle grazing season of June through October. This includes "light to moderate" seasonal utilization which is measured before the end of the growing season and is used in determining when cattle need to move, in consideration of other factors such as weather patterns,

[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.

likelihood of plant regrowth, and previous years' utilization levels. Cattle would move from one pasture to another when seasonal utilization approaches a "light to moderate" level, approximately 21-50 percent. Pastures would not be grazed again during the grazing season. Once the use guideline is met across the allotment, cattle would be moved off the allotment.

Adaptive Management

- The Proposed Action includes the continued use of adaptive management, which provides more flexibility for managing cattle. Adaptive management allows the Forest Service to adjust the timing, period, and occurrence of cattle grazing, movement of cattle within the allotment, and cattle numbers. If adjustments are needed, they are implemented through the Annual Operating Instructions, which would 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 warrant an adaptive management adjustment is drought.
- 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 changes would not exceed the limits for timing, intensity, period, occurrence, and frequency of cattle grazing defined in this Proposed Action.

Monitoring

The Proposed Action includes monitoring. Monitoring is also adaptive, and as improved methods are developed, these new methods would be used. Historic monitoring would be adapted to include these improved methods. The type and frequency of monitoring would include:

- Permittee compliance, allotment inspections, range readiness, forage production, rangeland utilization (annually).
- Long term trend monitoring at seven historic Parker 3-step plots scattered throughout the allotment, which includes: pictures, plant frequency, and ground cover plots to estimate trend; and species composition by 1/10 acre canopy cover plots (every 5 to 10 years or as funding is available).
- A monitoring plot was established in 2007 to record annual range observations such as; forage production, moisture, frequency, canopy cover, ground cover, and photo points. Monitoring of this plot will continue as funding is available.

Structural Range Improvements

- Construct approximately 2.5 miles of new 3-strand barbwire/smooth wire fence in the Coulter pasture. This fence will create the North and South Coulter pastures and will improve grazing management by improving timing, intensity, frequency and duration of livestock grazing. This fence will be constructed in accordance with wildlife specifications.

Other Considerations

Coconino Forest Plan Consistency: This action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the 1987 Coconino Forest Plan (Forest Plan) and all subsequent amendments, and helps maintain and/or move the project area towards desired conditions described in that plan. The proposed action is consistent with the direction listed in the Forest-wide standards and guidelines, and the following Management Areas (MA): MA 3 Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer; <40% Slope, MA 4 Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer; >40% Slope, MA 5 Aspen, MA 6 Unproductive Timber Land, MA 9 Mountain Grassland, MA 10 Grassland and Sparse Pinyon-juniper Above the Rim, MA 12 Riparian

and Open Water, MA 18 Elden Environmental Study Area, MA 28 Schenbly Rim, MA 35 Lake Mary Watershed, MA 38 West, MA PVT Private Land, and STAT State Trust Land.

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 would be allocated for livestock grazing and this allotment management plan would 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 of 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 would be devoted to other uses prior to the end of ten years, or it would be in best interest of sound land management to specify a shorter term.

Environmental Analysis

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Peaks Ranger District has analyzed the environmental impacts of this proposal. Based on the results, this project can be categorically excluded from analysis in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) under authority of Section 339 of the 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447), as amended in 2008 (H.R. 2764; P.L. 110-161). As amended, Section 339 of the Act allows decisions that authorize grazing on an allotment to be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS if all three of the following conditions are present:

1. The decision continues current grazing management of the allotment.
2. Monitoring indicates that current grazing management of the allotments is meeting, or satisfactorily moving toward, objectives in the land and resource management plan, as determined by the Secretary.
3. The decision is consistent with agency policy concerning extraordinary circumstances (FSH 1909.15, 30.3 (2)). The categorical exclusion under this section shall not apply with respect to any allotment in federally designated wilderness area.

The extraordinary circumstances related to this project which have been analyzed to date are:

- Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat: There is a determination of "may affect not likely to adversely affect" for Mexican spotted owls and their critical habitat. This determination is based on the criteria outlined in the Framework for Streamlining Informal Consultation for Livestock Grazing Activities (USDA Forest Service 2005). The determination is appropriate as all three of the following criteria are met:
    - Livestock grazing or livestock management activities will occur within protected activity centers (PAC), but no human disturbance or construction actions associated with the livestock grazing will occur in PACs during the breeding season.
    - Livestock grazing and livestock management activities within PACs, in the action area, will be managed for levels that provide the woody and herbaceous vegetation necessary for cover for rodent prey species, and maintain the residual biomass that will support prescribed natural and ignited fires that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Forest.

- In owl foraging areas, forage utilization will be maintained at conservative levels (30-40 %).

PAC habitat within the allotments is approximately 3,193 acres of mostly steep habitat with high canopy cover restricting understory growth and is rarely used by livestock. Given the current utilization standards the proposed action is unlikely to result in adverse affects to Mexican spotted owls.

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: No wetlands or municipal watersheds exist within the project area. One floodplain (Pumphouse Wash) exists within the project area. The Proposed Action defers cattle grazing within the Pumphouse Wash area, and therefore no extraordinary circumstance exists from this project to the Pumphouse Wash floodplain.

- 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 the project area.

- Inventoried roadless areas: There are no inventoried roadless areas in the project area.

- Research Natural Areas: There are no inventoried Research Natural Areas in the project area.

- Native American areas of traditional cultural importance, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas: Thirteen Native American tribes have been consulted on this project. An archeological survey and clearance report is being completed for this project. No adverse effects to archeological resources or sites are anticipated.

Decision Framework

The Peaks District Ranger is the responsible official for deciding whether or not lands within the Casner Park/Kelly Seep Allotment currently authorized for grazing would be authorized in the future and in what manner. Items in this decision include: number of cattle, utilization level, season of use, and grazing management system. A decision will be based on a consideration of the area's existing and desired resource conditions, environmental issues, and the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action or alternatives. Should the decision authorize cattle grazing, any and all grazing practices within the scope of the analysis would be further detailed in the terms and conditions of a new AMP and term grazing permit.

Contact Person

For more information about this proposal contact Gary Hase, Jr., Peaks/Mormon Lake Rangeland Management Specialist, at 928-527-8262 or at ghase@fs.fed.us.