

PROPOSED ACTION: GRAZING MANAGEMENT FOR THE MAXWELL SPRINGS GRAZING ALLOTMENT – FEBRUARY 2008

Introduction

The Peaks Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest is proposing to re-authorize cattle grazing on the Maxwell Springs Allotment (see Map 1). The Maxwell Springs Allotment east boundary begins approximately 5 miles west of the City of Flagstaff and is situated completely north from Interstate 40. This allotment is located within all or portions of: T22N, R5E Sections 34-36, 25-27, and 22-24; T22N, R6E Sections 3, 4, 8-10, 15-21, 28-33; T21N R6E, Sections 3-6, 8-10, 15, and 16.

The Maxwell Springs Allotment consists of approximately 21,300 acres (see Map 1). It includes six pastures: Camp Two, Telephone, Wing, Maxwell Springs, Hart Prairie, and Holding. Approximately 500 acres are privately owned. The current permit on the Maxwell Allotment allows 285 head of cattle (cow/calf) from June 1 through October 31; this equates to 1,434 HM's or 1,892 AUM's.

Ponderosa pine, Arizona fescue, mountain muhly, and blue grama are the dominate vegetation types on the Maxwell Allotment. Allotment elevation ranges from 7,200 to 8,500 feet. The ponderosa pine and grassland vegetation types vary from open grassland to dense trees. The allotment lies between Interstate 40 at Bellemont on the south; the Kaibab National Forest on west; the far south end of Hart Prairie on the north; and Fort Valley (Baderville) on the east. There are no other major canyons or riparian areas on the allotment. Maxwell Springs and Marvin Springs are excluded from cattle grazing by enclosure fences.

Existing, and Desired Conditions

Permitted grazing rates on the Maxwell Springs Allotment have declined over the last 18 years (Table 1) and overall, management has changed little during this time. However, yearly grazing has varied primarily due to drought and suppressed forage production. For example, in the last ten years grazing intensity has varied between 1,892 permitted AUMs (3 separate years) to approximately 60% permitted numbers and/or season (2 separate years). Grazing intensity was reduced an average of 18% the remaining 5 years.

Table 1. Maxwell Allotment actual use statistics from 1990 to 2007.

Year Grazed	# of Livestock	Dates	Head Months	AUM's
1990	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
1991	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
1992	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
1993	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
1994	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
1995	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
1996	150	6/1-10/31	755	996
1997	265	6/5-10/31	1298	1714
1998	245	6/10-10/31	1160	1531
1999	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
2000	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
2001	285	6/1-10/31	1434	1892
2002	125	6/10-11/10	633	835
2003	115	6/24-11/10	529	699
2004	132	6/1-6/5	22	29
	250	6/6-10/31	1216	1606
Total '04			1238	1635
2005	266	6/1-10/31	1338	1766
2006	240	6/1-10/31	1207	1594
2007	110	6/15-8/9	203	267
	285	8/10-10/31	778	1027
Total '07			981	1294

For the last 10 years, utilization has been below the 35 percent guideline established for this allotment, except in 1999 and 2001 when two pastures were grazed to 40 and 45%. In 2000 and 2002, these pastures were monitored more closely and utilization was kept within the use guidelines. Table 2 displays the average pasture use recorded at the end of the growing season from 1998 to 2007.

Table 2. Maxwell Allotment End of Season Utilization from 1998 to 2007

Year	Pasture	End of Season Utilization	Year	Pasture	End of Season Utilization
1998	Camp Two	5	2003	Camp Two	21
	Telephone	35		Telephone	0
	Wing	35		Wing	11
	Hart Prairie	30		Hart Prairie	0
	Maxwell	15		Maxwell	0
	Holding	35		Holding	21
1999	Camp Two	0	2004	Camp Two	0
	Telephone	10		Telephone	21
	Wing	40		Wing	21
	Hart Prairie	20		Hart Prairie	10
	Maxwell	40		Maxwell	20
	Holding	30		Holding	21

Year	Pasture	End of Season Utilization	Year	Pasture	End of Season Utilization
2000	Camp Two	0	2005	Camp Two	0
	Telephone	15		Telephone	10
	Wing	30		Wing	35
	Hart Prairie	30		Hart Prairie	30
	Maxwell	30		Maxwell	20
	Holding	30		Holding	35
2001	Camp Two	10	2006	Camp Two	35
	Telephone	30		Telephone	0
	Wing	45		Wing	5
	Hart Prairie	35		Hart Prairie	30
	Maxwell	45		Maxwell	30
	Holding	30		Holding	25
2002	Camp Two	35	2007	Camp Two	5
	Telephone	10		Telephone	25
	Wing	30		Wing	20
	Hart Prairie	15		Hart Prairie	35
	Maxwell	30		Maxwell	20
	Holding	35		Holding	30

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 1952, 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.

The current range condition(s) and trend(s) 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, except in 1999 and 2001. In 1999 and 2001, the Maxwell and Wing Pastures were grazed to 40-45 percent, with no lasting effect. Cattle must be moved early if the seasonal utilization level is reached prior to planned rotations; or possibly cattle can be denied entry to a pasture if seasonal utilization by wildlife already meets the seasonal utilization guideline. Elk grazing has not been a concern on this allotment. Early moves or skipping areas has not been routinely needed under the current grazing system and has only occurred on occasion, mainly related to recent drought conditions.

Of the approximate 21,000 acres on the Maxwell Springs 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 99% of the soils within the Maxwell Springs Allotment are rated as satisfactory; the remaining 1% is rated as impaired. Based upon this information, Forest Service System lands on the Maxwell Springs Allotment are considered to be in overall satisfactory condition.

Purpose and Need

The Maxwell Springs 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 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 Maxwell Springs 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.

A management plan is in place and land management objectives under the current livestock management are shown to be meeting or moving the area toward desired conditions. Management is consistent with Forest Plan standards, guidelines, goals, and objectives.

The Maxwell Springs Allotment contains lands identified as suitable for domestic livestock grazing in the Coconino Forest Plan. Continued cattle grazing is consistent with the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines of the Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service, 1987).

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 Maxwell Springs Allotment for 285 head of cattle (cow/calf) from June 1 through October 31 (1,892 AUM). The authorization would be through a term grazing permit.
- The proposed permitted use is based on condition and trend studies completed in 2006 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 utilization¹ 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, 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,

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.

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; dry weight rank method estimates; relative species composition by weight, 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 2006 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

- Install cattlegaurds on the allotment boundary in four separate locations.
- Remove approximately 3 miles of fence.

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, Less Than 40% Slopes; MA 4 Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer, Greater Than 40% Slopes; MA 5 Aspen; MA 6 Unproductive Timber Land; MA 9 Mountain Grassland; MA 10 Grassland and Sparse Pinyon-juniper Above the Rim; MA 20 Highway 180 Corridor; and MA 38 West.

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 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:

- a. Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat: There are no threatened and endangered species or critical habitat in the project area.
- 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 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 Maxwell Springs 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

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