

SCOPING REPORT

Jarillas, Fresno, Cross S, Carrizo, Oro Blanco and Sardina Allotment Analysis

Nogales Ranger District Coronado National Forest

This report summarizes a Forest Service proposal to authorize grazing, implement range improvements, and develop allotment management plans (AMPs) for the Jarillas, Fresno, Carrizo, Oro Blanco, Cross S and Sardina Allotments on the Nogales Ranger District, Coronado National Forest, Pima and Santa Cruz Counties, Arizona. Where consistent with the goals and objectives of Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs), it is Forest Service policy to make forage from lands suitable for grazing available to qualified livestock operators (*FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1, 36 CFR 222.2(c), Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Management and Policy Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976*). The allotments include lands identified as suitable for grazing in the Coronado Forest LRMP and are being managed for grazing.

Federal actions such as authorization of grazing and approval of allotment management plans must be analyzed to determine potential environmental consequences (*National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA; Rescission Act of 1995, P.L. 104*).

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of July 2005. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.5, additional opportunities for public and agency review of the project will occur as the NEPA review progresses.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to implement management actions that would maintain or improve resource conditions on the Jarillas, Fresno, Carrizo, Oro Blanco, Cross S and Sardina allotments in a manner consistent with Forest Service policy and the Coronado National Forest LRMP. Specific proposed action and their associated purpose and need are shown in Table 2.

Existing Condition

The six grazing allotments are located in the Tumacacori Ecosystem Management Area west of Interstate 19. The allotments are bounded on the west by the Buenos Aires Wildlife Refuge, on the south by Mexico, on the north by state and private land and on the east by other Forest allotments. Vegetation is broadleaf evergreen woodland, desert grassland and southwest desert scrub. Range condition and trend were evaluated on all of the allotments in 2004. The data indicate that the allotments meet or exceed LMP standards, with all areas in fair or good condition. Utilization is under 45% in all key areas and stocking appears to be within capacity. There appears to be little need for change from current management. Current permitted numbers and recent grazing use on the allotments is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Season of use, permitted numbers and stocking levels for the past 5 years.

	Jarillas	Fresnal	Carrizo	Oro Blanco	Cross S	Sardina
Total Acres	12,485	13,022	3,609	3,183	18,398	12,068
Capable Acres¹	12,399	12,440	3,204	2,713	17,743	10,527
Permitted #	270	280	105	123	450	340
Season of use	Yearlong	Yearlong	Yearlong	Yearlong	Yearlong	Yearlong
(Head Months²)	3,240	3,360	1,260	1,476	5,400	4,080
2004-2005 (HM)	3,240	2160	1,080	900	4,200	2,850
2003-2004 (HM)	3,240	960	1,188	960	2,850 20 horses	2,400
2002-2003 (HM)	3,360	1,176	1,092	1,032	3,600 20 horses	2,508
2001-2002 (HM)	3,360	1,176	864	1,032	2,484 18 horses	2,376
2000-2001 (HM)	3,240	2,568	1,092	852	5,184 18 horses	4,200

Desired Condition

The Coronado LMP (page 10) contains the following goals for the range program on the Forest.

- To restore rangeland to at least moderately high ecological condition (70% to 75% of potential production, fair range condition) with stable soil and a static to upward trend.
- Produce livestock products consistent with other resources and uses.
- Eliminate grazing from areas not capable of supporting livestock without significant detriment to range or other resources.
- Balance permitted grazing use with grazing capacity.

Actions proposed in Tables 2 and 3 are intended to support these goals and achieve the following specific objectives, which constitute the desired condition in the analysis area:

- Maintain or improve ecological condition of rangelands as expressed by the number of acres in fair or better condition.
- Occupied habitats for threatened, endangered, sensitive and management indicator species are maintained or improved and recovery objectives are being met.

Proposed Action

The Nogales Ranger District, Coronado National Forest, proposes to authorize grazing on the Jarillas, Fresnal, Carrizo, Oro Blanco, Cross S and Sardina allotments under the following terms and conditions that define the limits for the duration, intensity, frequency and timing of grazing.

- **Duration:** Grazing would be authorized year-round on the Jarillas, Fresnal, Cross S, Oro Blanco and Carrizo allotments, but may be less in some years. Use on the Sardina Allotment would be 9 months and the season of use would vary from year to year.

¹ Capable acres are defined as areas under 40% slope and capable of producing 100 lbs per acre of forage. Areas considered “not capable” primarily consist of steep slopes in upper elevations of the allotments. No grazing capacity is assigned to non-capable areas

² Head months is calculated by multiplying the number of livestock grazed by the number of months grazing occurs.

- **Intensity:** Forage utilization will be targeted at 30-40% of current year's growth on all six allotments and will be limited to 35% during the growing season (July-September) and 45% during the dormant season (October-June).
- **Frequency and Timing:** Management systems will be designed to incorporate growing season rest or deferment in order to provide for grazed plant recovery. Timing of pasture moves will be dictated by utilization monitoring and management objectives specified in allotment management plans.

The proposed action incorporates management flexibility by providing a range of allowable numbers that reflects variations in resource conditions and management objectives over time. Within this range, annual permitted livestock numbers will be specified in annual operating instructions. Initial stocking rates will be set based on existing resource and infrastructure conditions and are based on the average sustainable stocking on the allotments over the past decade. Changes in stocking would occur as a result of changes in resource conditions or management objectives. Herd movements would be determined by utilization levels, forage conditions and water availability and will be specified in annual operating instructions. Allotment-specific proposed actions are shown in Table 2.

New allotment management plans (AMPs) will be developed for all six allotments. The plans will also include mitigation measures and Best Management Practices to avoid or minimize effects to wildlife, soil and water quality. Monitoring of forage availability and utilization, range readiness and resource conditions will be used to determine whether management is being properly implemented and whether the actions are effective at achieving or moving toward desired conditions.

Existing range improvements are considered sufficient to accomplish management on the allotments. No new improvements are proposed.

Table 2. Proposed Grazing Management.

Allotment	Grazing System	Head Months	Cattle Yearlong (cow/calf)	Change from Current Permit
Jarillas	7-pasture Santa Rita rest rotation	2700-3240	225-270	Change to a range of numbers.
Fresnal	5-pasture deferred rotation	2160-3360	180-280	Change to a range of numbers.
Carrizo	4-pasture deferred rest rotation	840-1260	70-105	Change to a range of numbers.
Oro Blanco	5-pasture deferred rest rotation	960-1476	80-123	Change to a range of numbers.
Cross S	10-pasture deferred rotation	3600-5400	300-450	Change to a range of numbers.
Sardina	4-pasture deferred rotation	2250-3150	250-350	Change to a range of numbers.

Preliminary Issues

A Forest Service interdisciplinary team met in March 2004 and identified preliminary issues and concerns to be carried forward into the analysis. Mitigation measures that reduce or avoid impacts to affected resources will be developed and described in the EA for the following concerns.

- **Grazing effects on wildlife:** Authorization of grazing may have adverse effects on threatened, endangered, proposed, sensitive (TEPS) species or on management indicator species (MIS) or their habitats. Effects will be evaluated and disclosed in wildlife specialist's reports including a Biological Assessment, Biological Evaluation and Management Indicator Species Analysis.

- **Grazing effects on vegetation condition:** Grazing at the proposed utilization levels may impede the attainment of LRMP objectives for range vegetation.
- **Grazing effects on riparian area condition:** Grazing may prevent the attainment of satisfactory riparian conditions within the allotments.
- **Effects of illegal immigration and the international boundary on allotment management.** The maintenance of allotment infrastructure is problematic because of the heavy and sustained use of the area by illegal border crossers and US Border Patrol interdiction efforts.

Additional environmental components include soil, air, water, heritage resources and economics. Effects on these resources will be discussed in narrative or tabular form.

Preliminary Alternative Development

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) for the project has identified the following alternatives to the proposed action. Further alternatives may be identified or alternatives may be revised if scoping results in the identification of issues not already identified, or if additional management practices are identified that achieve the desired condition.

Alternative 1 – No Action/No Grazing

Forest Service Policy (Forest Service Handbook 2209.13) requires the Forest Service to identify no grazing as the No Action alternative. Under this alternative, grazing would not be authorized and use of the allotments by domestic livestock would be discontinued. Existing structural improvements would remain in place but would not be maintained. Improvements contributing to resource protection or enhancement, such as water developments important for wildlife, would be maintained where feasible using other program funds. Periodic inspection of structural improvements would be used to determine whether maintenance or removal is needed. Removal or maintenance of improvements would be authorized by a separate decision. Where necessary, maintenance of allotment boundary fences would be reassigned to adjacent permittees with the understanding that livestock are to be kept off of the allotments.

Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action

The proposed action is described above.

Decision to be Made

The Nogales District Ranger is the official responsible for decisions on whether or not to authorize grazing on the allotments. If a decision is made to authorize grazing, the Ranger will also decide which management practices and mitigation measures will be prescribed in the AMPs, including season of use, livestock facilities to be constructed, and term of the permit. Separate decisions may be made for each allotment or for all six allotments, combined.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, evaluation methodology, and alternatives. Suggestions for additional actions that may be undertaken to facilitate achievement of desired conditions are encouraged. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received early and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. Issues that are outside of the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this level of planning. The expected date of completion of the analysis is September 2005.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Richard Gerhart, Analysis Team Leader, Coronado National Forest, 300 West Congress Street, Tucson, Arizona 85701, telephone (520) 388-8374, rgerhart@fs.fed.us. The Nogales Ranger District contact for the proposals is Kendall Brown, Range Management Staff, Nogales Ranger District (520-281-2296).