

# SCOPING SUMMARY

## HQ, Campini and Blacktail Allotment Analysis

Sierra Vista Ranger District  
Coronado National Forest

### **Background**

This report summarizes a Forest Service proposal to authorize grazing, implement range improvements and develop allotment management plans (AMPs) for the HQ, Campini and Blacktail Allotments in the Sierra Vista Ranger District, Coronado National Forest. Where consistent with the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines 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 22.2 (c), Multiple Use and Sustained Yield act of 1960, Wilderness Act of 1964, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974*). The allotments include lands identified as suitable for grazing in the Coronado National Forest LRMP and are being managed for grazing.

Federal actions such as the authorization of grazing and development of range improvements must be analyzed to determine potential environmental consequences and effects must be disclosed (*National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, NEPA; Rescission Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-19)*). This report has been prepared to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist in the NEPA review of the proposal.

The allotments are adjacent to one another and are located on the east side of the San Rafael Valley southwest of the Huachuca Mountains and immediately north of the border with Mexico in portions of Townships 23 and 24 South, Ranges 18 and 19 East (Map 1). Elevations in the project area range from 4,800 to 5,500 feet. Vegetation is a mix of plains grassland and Madrean oak woodland. Topography is relatively flat, consisting of a number of broad mesas separated by a series of drainages running generally north to south. Major drainages include Parker, Sunnyside, Bodie and Blacktail Canyons.

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose and need of the proposed action is to implement management actions that would maintain or improve resource conditions on the HQ, Campini and Blacktail Allotments in a manner consistent with Forest Service policy and the Coronado National Forest LRMP. Specific proposed actions and their associated purpose and need are shown in Tables 2 and 3 (below).

### **Existing Condition**

Ecological condition data collected for the allotments indicate that the allotments are all meeting LRMP standards for range condition, and have improved markedly since transects were first established in the late 1950's. On some of the mesas in the project area, historic use resulted in soil compaction and some soil loss that continues to contribute to soil impairment and reduced productivity. Nevertheless, soils in the project area are some of the most productive on the Forest. Information on recent management is summarized in Table 1.

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**Table 1. Allotment size, stocking and recent use: HQ, Campini and Blacktail Allotments.**

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		HQ	Campini	Blacktail
Total Acres <sup>1</sup>		1570	6,700	4,077
Capable Acres <sup>2</sup>		1570	6,700	4,077
Management System		2-pasture deferred rotation	4-pasture deferred rest rotation	5-pasture deferred rest rotation
Current permitted Use (CYL) <sup>3</sup>		28 CYL	215 CYL	130 CYL
Permitted use (AUM) <sup>4</sup>		444	3,406	2,059
Recent Actual Use	2000	45	149	97
	2001	rested	150	120
	2002	25	144	96
	2003	18	132	44
	2004	16	62*	60

\*Allotment rested during growing season (4/15-9/30).

Production and utilization studies were conducted on all three allotments in 1999 and 2000. The results of these studies have been used to formulate new permit levels and to identify needed management actions.

### **Desired Condition**

The Coronado LRMP identifies the following goals for the range program on the Forest.

- 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:

- Improvement in ecological condition as expressed by the number of acres in fair or better condition.
- Increase in range production and movement toward site potential for each soil/vegetation site.
- Stabilization of soils and reduction of down cutting.

### **Proposed Action**

The Sierra Vista Ranger District proposes to authorize grazing on the HQ, Campini and Blacktail allotments under the following terms and conditions:

- Forage utilization on all three allotments will be limited to 45% of current year's growth of key species in key areas.
- Management on each allotment will be designed to insure that pastures receive periodic growing season rest or deferment.

<sup>1</sup> Acreage figures shown include private lands on the allotment managed under a private land permit.

<sup>2</sup> Capable acres are defined as areas under 40% slope and capable of producing 100 pounds of dry forage per acre. Areas considered "not capable" are not used to calculate grazing capacity.

<sup>3</sup> CYL: Cattle yearlong

<sup>4</sup> An AUM is the amount of *forage* required by one animal unit for a period of 30 days. One animal unit is considered to be a mature cow of approximately 1000 pounds. A cow with a calf is 1.32 AUM.

New allotment management plans would be developed for each allotment. The plans would incorporate an adaptive management strategy under which the number of permitted cattle, season of use and pasture rotations can vary from year to year depending on resource conditions and management objectives. 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. The plans will also include mitigation measures and Best Management Practices to avoid or minimize effects to wildlife, soil and water quality. The range of numbers proposed is based on the average AUMs available on the allotments over the past decade and on the average of recent sustainable stocking. Actions specific to each allotment are shown in Tables 1 and 3.

**Table 2. Description, Purpose and Need for Proposed Actions and Improvements**

Allotment	Proposed Action	Purpose and Need
All	Continue to authorize grazing with changes in stocking described in Table 3. Develop Allotment Management Plans	Balance permitted use with capacity and provide long-term management to achieve desired conditions.
HQ	Develop upland waters in the two primary pastures by piping water from an existing well.	The allotment is reliant on dirt tanks, which requires the permittee to haul water in some years. Permanent waters would improve distribution and reduce overuse of some areas.
HQ	Construct erosion control structures to arrest and rehabilitate head cuts.	Erosion cuts are threatening an otherwise functioning gentle drainage system. Structures would improve soil retention and vegetative cover.
Campini	Cross fence the large Mesa pasture to create 2 pastures. Construct a water lot around George Tank to water both pastures.	An additional pasture would increase deferment time for all pastures and create 3 pastures of approximately equal capacity. This would reduce the duration of grazing in any given pasture, promote plant vigor and increase management flexibility.
Campini	Realign the fence separating Heifer and Lower pastures.	This would increase capacity and improve distribution in the Heifer pasture by allowing the use of forage that is not used by cattle in Lower pasture and reducing grazing intensity in other areas.
Blacktail	Fence an existing spring in Sundown Canyon and pipe water to a nearby location.	This would protect aquatic and riparian resources at the spring site and provide reliable water for livestock.

**Table 3. Proposed management and authorization.**

Allotment	Grazing System	Animal Unit Months Permitted	Change from Current Management
HQ	2 pasture deferred rest rotation	317-586 AUM	Change from 444 AUM.
Campini	5 pasture deferred rest rotation	1584-2376 AUM	Change from 3406 AUM. One new pasture.
Blacktail	5 pasture deferred rest rotation	1272-1742 AUM	Change from 2059 AUM.

**Preliminary Alternative Development.**

In addition to the proposed action, the Interdisciplinary Team for the project has identified the following alternatives for analysis. Further alternatives may be identified or alternatives may be

revised if scoping results in the identification of significant issues related to the proposed action that cannot be mitigated, or if additional management practices are identified that achieve the desired condition.

### **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.

### **Continue Current Management**

Livestock grazing would continue on all allotments as currently permitted. New permits would be issued for the classes and numbers of livestock currently allowed. New allotment management plans would be developed and authorized use would continue to be controlled through annual operating instructions. The plans will also include mitigation measures and Best Management Practices to avoid or minimize effects to wildlife, soil and water quality. Existing fences, water developments and other range improvements would be maintained, but no new infrastructure would be proposed or developed.

### **Preliminary issues and concerns**

To date, the Forest has not identified unresolvable issues related to the proposed action. Several concerns have been identified for which mitigation will be developed and which will be used to evaluate the effects of the proposed action and alternatives. These will be refined or expanded as a result of comments received from the public and other interested parties. Significant issues identified as a result of scoping will be used to formulate additional alternatives if necessary.

- 1. Grazing effects on wildlife:** The timing and intensity of grazing in the project area could affect wildlife, including threatened, endangered, proposed, sensitive (TEPS) species, management-indicator species, and their respective habitats. Effects will be evaluated through narratives and tables describing effects, by alternative, as identified through a Wildlife Specialist's Reports, Biological Assessment and Evaluation and consultation with appropriate wildlife resource agencies.
- 2. Soil and watershed condition:** Management practices on the allotments, in combination with natural features, may affect soil condition and erosion either positively or negatively. Effects will be evaluated through narrative and tabular descriptions, by alternative, as identified through a range and soil condition and trend analysis.
- 3. Upland vegetation condition.** Livestock distribution and utilization levels may impair achievement of Forest Plan standards for restoring rangelands. Condition will be described and compared in narrative and tabular form, by alternative, as identified by range condition and trend analysis data.

The potential for the projects to affect air quality, water quality, riparian, heritage (cultural) resources and economics will be assessed. Effects on these resources will be evaluated through specialist's reports and consultation with appropriate tribes and regulatory agencies. Effects will be disclosed in narrative and tabular form.

### **Decision Framework**

The Sierra Vista District Ranger is the official responsible for decisions regarding management of the HQ, Campini and Blacktail Allotments. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the Ranger would decide whether the proposed action would proceed as proposed, as modified by an alternative, or not at all. If it proceeds, the Ranger would determine which mitigation measures and monitoring requirements would be prescribed in each AMP, including authorized use and season of use, range facilities to be constructed, allowable utilization standards and the term of the permits. Separate decisions may be made for each allotment or for all three allotments, combined.

### **Public Input Needed**

We are requesting your comments regarding the proposed action, preliminary concerns, evaluation methodology and alternatives to assist us in the NEPA review. 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 within 30 days of receipt of this correspondence; however, comments will be accepted throughout the analysis process. The expected date of completion of the analysis is September 2005. Issues that are outside of the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this level of planning. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.5, additional opportunities for public and agency review of the project will occur as the NEPA review progresses.

Please provide comments to Richard Gerhart, Analysis Team Leader, Coronado National Forest, 300 West Congress Street, Tucson, Arizona 85701, telephone (520) 388-8374. Electronic (email) comments should be sent to [comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us). To obtain details about the technical aspects of the proposal, please contact Bill Edwards, Range Management Staff, Sierra Vista Ranger District, telephone (520) 378-3011.