



File Code: 1950-1/2210

Date: August 4, 2009

***Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Coronado National Forest:***

I am writing today to inform you of a proposal by the Nogales Ranger District, Coronado National Forest to authorize continued livestock grazing on the Lake Allotment located around Arivaca Lake in Santa Cruz County, Arizona. The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposed authorizations 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) to be completed during 2009. The EA will describe the existing and desired conditions of the affected environment within the allotment and will identify management practices to resolve discrepancies, if any, between the two. Current knowledge regarding existing and desired conditions, and potential management practices, is described below.

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 regulations at 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**

Where consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives, there is congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands. (*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*). By regulation, forage-producing lands are to be managed for livestock grazing where consistent with land and resource management plans (36 CFR 222.2(C)). It is Forest Service policy to make forage from lands suitable for grazing available to qualified livestock operators (FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1). 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 (NEPA) of 1969; Rescission Act of 1995, P.L. 104*).

The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize livestock grazing in a manner consistent with Forest Service policy and the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).



The purpose and need arose because:

- The Lake Allotment includes land identified as suitable for grazing in the Coronado National Forest Plan.
- The allotment requires environmental analysis necessary to comply with the Recession Act (P.L 104, 1996).
- There is a need to incorporate additional management flexibility through and adaptive management strategy consistent with Forest Service policy (FSH 2209.13, Chapter 90).

**Existing Condition**

The grazing allotment is located west of the Tumacacori Mountains, and surrounds Arivaca Lake (see attached maps). Vegetation is desert grassland and southwest desert scrub. Current permitted numbers and recent grazing use on the allotment is displayed in Table 1. Forest Service monitoring data indicates the allotment is currently meeting Forest Plan standards for upland vegetation, soil and watershed condition. Range ecological condition and trend were evaluated on the allotment in 2009 and indicates that the allotment meets or exceeds Forest Plan standards, with all areas in fair to excellent condition. Utilization has generally been well below 45% in all key areas and stocking appears to be within capacity. There appears to be little need for change from current management.

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

	<b>Lake Allotment</b>
Total Acres	1,325 Acres
Capable Acres <sup>1</sup>	1,325 Acres
Permitted Numbers	31 cow/calf
Season of Use	Year-round
Animal Unit Months (AUMs)	372
2007-2008 (AUMs)	372
2006-2007 (AUMs)	372
2005-2006 (AUMs)	372
2004-2005 (AUMs)	372
2003-2004 (AUMs)	372

**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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 allotment. No grazing capacity is assigned to non-capable areas.

Allotment management plans will be developed to support these goals to provide for 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 with stable or upward trends.
- Occupied habitats for native wildlife species are maintained or improved and recovery objectives for listed species are being met.
- Provide management flexibility to allow management to adapt to changing resources conditions.

### **Proposed Action**

Grazing would be authorized on the allotment under the following terms and conditions:

Timing: Although the allotment would be permitted for year-long use, individual pastures would be grazed at varying times during the year. Most use for a given pasture would occur during the dormant season and care would be taken to limit repeated growing season use.

Intensity: Forage utilization would be managed at a level corresponding to light to moderate intensity (maximum of 45% annual utilization in key areas) in order to provide for grazed plant recovery, increased herbage production and retention of herbaceous litter to protect soils and provide forage and cover for wildlife. Consistent patterns of utilization in excess of 45% of key species in key areas would be used as a basis to modify management practices or take administrative actions necessary to reduce utilization in subsequent grazing seasons. Areas dominated by exotic grass species such as Lehman's lovegrass would be allowed a maximum utilization of 55% to take advantage of the high production and regrowth capacity of these grasses.

Duration: The allotment is divided into several pastures. Typically each pasture would be used for a few months when they are grazed.

Frequency: Livestock grazing would be managed under a deferred use/rest rotation system to insure adequate rest following use. After a pasture has received adequate rest it would be available to be grazed again.

Grazing authorization would be accomplished through the issuance of new 10-year term grazing permit. Permitted use appears to be balanced with capacity on the allotment, so no changes in permitted use are proposed. A new allotment management plans (AMP) would be developed and would incorporate an adaptive management strategy. The adaptive management approach provides for continuous improvement of management effectiveness based on a "monitoring and adapt" strategy that allows management to change with changing resource conditions. Using adaptive management, specific numbers of livestock would be set each year based on resource conditions and management objectives for the allotment. Pasture rotation would be planned at the beginning of each grazing year and would be continually modified in response to changing resource conditions with the objective of not grazing any one pasture during consecutive growing seasons.

No additional structural improvements are proposed with this action.

### **Preliminary Issues**

A Forest Service interdisciplinary team met in May 2009 and identified the following preliminary issues to be carried forward into the analysis.

- **Wildlife-** Continued grazing in the project area could result in effects to wildlife, including listed, sensitive and management indicator species and their habitats. Effects could include modification of the structure and composition of plant communities that provide habitat through selective removal of forage, disturbance during critical periods, and changes in the availability of water. Effects can be both positive and negative, depending on the timing, intensity, frequency and duration of grazing.
- **Soil, watershed and riparian condition-** Continued grazing in the project area could affect soil condition, and hydrological function. Effects can be both positive and negative, depending on the timing, intensity, frequency and duration of grazing.
- **Upland vegetation-** Continued grazing on the allotment could lead to changes in the composition, structure and vigor of upland vegetation and could affect the condition and trend of rangeland resources.

Additional environmental considerations in this EA include potential effects to **air quality, water quality and quantity, heritage (archeological and historical) resources and economics**. Effects on these resources are evaluated through specialists' reports and consultation with tribes and regulatory agencies. Design criteria have been incorporated into the proposed action to avoid or minimize effects to these resources.

### **Preliminary Alternative Development**

In addition to the proposed action, Forest Service policy requires the analysis of a "No Action" alternative, described below. To date, no other issues have been identified that would require the development of additional alternatives. 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 allotment 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 allotment boundary fences would be reassigned to adjacent permittees with the understanding that livestock are to be kept off of the allotments.

### **Decision to be Made**

The Nogales District Ranger is the official responsible for decisions on whether or not to authorize grazing on the allotment. If decision is made to authorize grazing, the Ranger will also decide which management practices and mitigations measures will be prescribed in AMP, including season of use, livestock facilities to be constructed, and term of the permit.

### **Your Opportunity To Comment**

The Coronado National Forest values public input during the NEPA review process. 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 relevant to this specific proposed action and project area. Issues outside of the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this level of planning.

Your comments about this proposal may be submitted to us in writing by U.S. mail, facsimile, or hand-delivery; electronically by email; and orally, by telephone or in person at the District office. To be most useful in our NEPA review, comments should be submitted to us within 30 calendar days following your receipt of this notice.

Our mailing address is Nogales Ranger District, 303 Old Tucson Road, Nogales, AZ 85621. Facsimiles may be sent to (520) 281-2396. Please include your full name and address and project title (Lake Allotment) with your comments. Electronic (email) comments may be submitted to us at [comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us). Please submit email comments in any of the following ways: text of your email, in a Microsoft Word (.doc) attachment, or in rich-text format (.rtf). Please include "Lake Allotment" in the subject line.

For additional information about this project, please contact Analysis Team Leader, Sean Lockwood, at (520) 761-6000 or by email at [seanlockwood@fs.fed.us](mailto:seanlockwood@fs.fed.us). Questions about the NEPA review process may be directed to Forest NEPA Coordinator Andrea W. Campbell at (520) 388-8352 or [awcampbell@fs.fed.us](mailto:awcampbell@fs.fed.us).

*Thank you for your interest and participation<sup>2</sup> in the activities of the Coronado National Forest.*

Sincerely,

*/s/ KENT C. ELLETT*

KENT C. ELLETT  
District Ranger

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<sup>2</sup> *Comments and personal information associated with them, such as names and addresses, become part of the Administrative Record of this NEPA review. As such, they may be made available to a third-party upon request under the authority of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Personally identifying information is protected by the Privacy Act. If you do not wish for your personal information to be released under the FOIA, you may choose not to include it with your comments. Alternatively, you may request an exemption from FOIA with your comment submittal. Should you choose the latter, you will be informed by the Forest Service as to whether or not your request qualifies for an exemption. If it does not, you would be afforded the opportunity to resubmit your comments without personal information or to withhold them altogether.*