

DECISION MEMO
For
Franklin Basin Livestock Grazing Allotment

Cache County, Utah
Logan Ranger District
Wasatch-Cache National Forest

BACKGROUND

The Logan Ranger District proposes to reauthorize livestock grazing on the Franklin Basin allotment located within the Logan River drainage on the Logan Ranger District of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest, Cache County, Utah (see attached map). Livestock grazing would be reauthorized on a two year temporary term basis, using current Forest Plan standards and guidelines and desired conditions to manage livestock use. The two year term is conditional based on the continued analysis of the allotment during the next two grazing seasons, 2008 and 2009.

Historically livestock have grazed this area from the late 1800's to present day. Franklin Basin was managed by the State of Utah until 1998 when it was part of a land exchange with the Forest Service. Included in the land exchange was an agreement between the State of Utah and the Forest Service that grazing would continue under "State of Utah Grazing Guidelines" for the ten year term of 1998 to 2008. Then the guidelines/terms and conditions would convert to forest grazing guidelines under a Term Grazing Permit.

It is expected that this direction will maintain these rangelands at current desired conditions or continue to move them towards desired conditions. This proposal recognizes the continuing need for forage production from Forest Service administered lands as identified in the Forest Plan.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

Currently with season long grazing, available data indicate grazing standards are being met. The 2007 Range Technical Report (available in the project file) for the Franklin Basin allotment summarizes project monitoring data at 9 separate sites. The report identifies 5 of the 9 study sites meeting Forest Grazing Standards. One site is listed in unsatisfactory condition, but moving towards Forest Grazing Standards, and the 3 remaining sites in the study are in unsatisfactory condition and not moving toward Forest Grazing Standards.

Soils Specialist Technical report indicates vegetation cover types include the Few-flowered sagebrush (ground cover range at potential 81 to 96%), silver sagebrush (89-96%), low sagebrush (69%), snowberry (92%), tall forb (49 to 75%), and curleaf mahogany (70-82%). Based upon field data collected, all of the vegetation communities within the Franklin Basin allotment are meeting RFP Standard S7 which reads, "Standard

(S7) Allow management activities to result in no less than 85% of potential ground cover for each vegetative cover type.

Additional data from Utah Field Crews for the Southwest Regional GAP Analysis Project (SW ReGAP) indicate that all 8 study sites (UT073101GM12 to UT073101GM05) that occur in the project area meet ground cover requirements. Additional data from USU on 5 separate study sites located in close proximity to established range study sites (from 1981 and 1986) in the project area, indicate 85% to 90% ground cover, meeting Forest Grazing Standards.

Based on this information I am authorizing a two year term grazing permit. This will allow us to further analyze data, re-evaluate grazing management of the allotment, and develop the additional information needed for an allotment management plan. As indicated in FSH 2209.13, a shorter term may be specified if it is “in the best interest of sound land management.” This will allow us to supplement and substantiate the current data that indicates we are meeting and satisfactorily moving Forest resources toward desired conditions and Forest Plan objectives.

MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation measures are part of my decision and will be incorporated in the annual operating instructions for this allotment.

1. Identify spring areas that may need spring protection and possible development.
2. White Pine Lake area will be closed to grazing.
3. Improve livestock distribution through good salting and riding practices.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during a scoping period beginning June 29, 2007. It was available on the Wasatch Cache National Forest (WCNF) website at www.fs.fed.us/r4/wcnf/projects/proposed. It was sent as a legal notice to the Herald Journal and appeared in that newspaper on July 4, 2007. Also, it was available for review at the Logan Ranger District Office. As a result of scoping, three people responded in the form of two comment letters and one office visit. These people raised issues about 1) impacts of grazing on threatened, endangered, or sensitive species, soils, and water quality, 2) Forest Service authority to Categorically Exclude the project, and 3) general comments on the potential negative impacts of grazing on public and their private land. All of these issues are addressed as part of this decision or are included in the project file. Documentation of public scoping is in the project file and available for review through the Logan Ranger District.

REASON FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Forest Service resource specialists have visited the project area, completed a biological evaluation and assessment and have determined that the environmental effects will be

minor. Upon reviewing the analysis to date I have determined that all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts have been incorporated into this decision. The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances as related to the resource conditions listed below.

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing of proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.** A Biological Assessment was completed and it was determined that for threatened, endangered, candidate, and proposed species, the project may effect individuals, but is not likely to adversely affect the Lynx or its habitat. A finding of no effect is given to the yellow-billed cuckoo and bald eagle. Field surveys in 2006 and 2007 have not identified potential habitat for the primrose within suitable habitat for grazing therefore the proposed action will have no effect on Maguire's Primrose. A Biological Evaluation was prepared for Forest Service sensitive species. A finding of may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species for the northern goshawk, flammulated owl, wolverine, Townsend's big-eared bat, and Bonneville cutthroat trout, Logan buckwheat, Cache penstemon and Brownie lady's slipper. A finding of no impact is given to the sage grouse, Columbia sharp-tailed grouse, great gray owl, three-toed woodpecker, pygmy rabbit, boreal owl, peregrine falcon, and spotted bat, Maguire's draba, Cronquist daisy and Frank Smith violet.
- b. Flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.** The Forest Hydrologist completed a Water Resources report. In that report he indicates currently, grazing on the Franklin Basin allotment has had very little trampling of stream banks or wetlands with the exception of a portion of lower Steep Canyon. Floodplains in the allotment are located mainly along the Logan River and grazing has not affected the ability of stream channels to function. Since the source of municipal water is from springs that are 12 miles down stream from the grazing allotment, it is expected that no effect to municipal water will occur. No effect to very little adverse effect to water resources, wetlands, floodplains and municipal water is expected because current conditions have very little adverse effects on these resources and these conditions are expected to remain as they are since the proposed action is a continuation of current grazing practices.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas.** The Franklin Basin allotment is not in any Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, or National Recreation Area.
- d. Inventoried Roadless Area.** The allotment is within the Mt. Naomi Roadless Area. However, no road construction or timber harvest will occur as part of this decision.
- e. Research Natural Areas.** No Research Natural Areas occur within the

allotment.

- f. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.** The Forest Archeologist, working with the Utah State Historic Preservation Office, identified 3 archeological and historic resources in the project area. They determined that the continued livestock grazing would have no effect on American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites and documentation is included in the project file.
- g. Archeological sites, historic properties or areas.** Same as above.

Based upon the findings described herein, I have determined that these actions are consistent with the types of actions described in Section 339 of the FY 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447). This legislation provides that certain decisions to authorize allotment grazing shall be categorically excluded (CE) from documentation in environmental assessments and environmental impact statements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The full text follows:

SEC. 339. For fiscal years 2005 through 2007, a decision made by the Secretary of Agriculture to authorize grazing on an allotment shall be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) if: (1) the decision continues current grazing management; (2) monitoring indicates that current grazing management is meeting, or satisfactorily moving toward, objectives in the land and resource management plan, as determined by the Secretary; and (3) the decision is consistent with agency policy concerning extraordinary circumstances. The total number of allotments that may be categorically excluded under this section may not exceed 900.

All three conditions for application of this authority have been met as follows:

1. There are no changes to the current grazing management on these allotments.
2. As noted above, the data collected indicates that current grazing is meeting or moving towards desired conditions and objectives in the Forest Plan.
3. Specialist reports were prepared indicating no adverse effects. The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances as related to the resource conditions listed above.

As such, this is a decision which has been categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. Based on past experience with similar management activities and upon the environmental analysis that has been conducted of this project, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

I have reviewed the Wasatch-Cache National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The actions in this project comply fully with the goals of the Forest

Plan, the "Management Area Direction" and the "Forest-Wide Standards and Guidelines" (See Chapter IV of the Forest Plan).

The management prescriptions within the allotment are: 2.6 (Undeveloped Areas), 3.1 a (Aquatic Habitat Emphasis) and 4.4 (Motorized Recreation Emphasis) which all allow livestock grazing to meet desired conditions. The actions in this project are consistent with the types of activities permitted under the 2.6, 3.1a, and 4.4 Management Prescriptions and comply fully with the goals of the Forest Plan, the "Cache Box Elder Management Area Direction" and the "Forest-Wide Standards and Guidelines" (See Chapter IV of the Forest Plan).

My decision complies with Public Law 104-19 Section 504(a) which requires the Forest Service to establish and adhere to a schedule for the completion of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and decision on all grazing allotments within the NFS unit for which NEPA is needed.

My conclusion is based on a review of the project record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) is not subject to appeal. The proposal is not one of the activities subject to appeal under the 215 rules as clarified on October 19, 2005 by the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of California in Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck.. This decision may be implemented immediately.

CONTACT PERSON

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_____/s/ Janet Valle_____

Janet Valle
Acting District Ranger

____9-27-07_____

Date

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