

Grazing Allotment Closure Record of Decision

RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST GRAZING ALLOTMENT CLOSURE RECORD OF DECISION

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision describes my decision to close eight Grazing Allotments on the Rio Grande National Forest. The purpose of the closures is described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan which will be implemented beginning December 20, 1996.

During the course of the Revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan a detailed range analysis was completed. The analysis included utilizing updated criteria for range suitability analysis and resulted in the identification of eight vacant grazing allotments that could be closed due to resource conflicts, lack of demand for grazing use, denial of access across private land, and proposals for Research Natural Area designation.

The FEIS does a good job of portraying both the cumulative and site specific effects of range management. Covering the site specific concerns of these grazing allotments with one NEPA document and a separate decision is the most effective way to assure continuity and understanding of range management decisions.

The complete analysis is contained in the FEIS on pages 3-181 through 3-197. The grazing allotments that will be closed by this decision are:

*Natural Arch:Recommended for closure due to conflicts between domestic and bighorn sheep and poor range conditions.

Red MountainRecommended for closure due to an unstable creek, denial of access across private land, and limited management opportunities to control livestock.

Goose Creek:Recommended for closure because of inaccessability through private land, conflict with summer elk range, and a narrow canyon that limits management opportunities.

Rito Alto/Crestone Recommended for closure due to conflicts between domestic and bighorn sheep, and conflicts with recreationists.

Cottonwood/Cherry Recommended for closure due to recreational conflicts, steep terrain, and possible domestic and bighorn sheep conflicts.

Dimmick Recommended for closure due to potential conflicts between recreationists and livestock, the length of time the allotment has been vacant, and a portion of the allotment is proposed as a Research Natural Area.

Sand Creek Recommended for closure due to lack of access through private land and conflicts between recreationists and livestock.

Medano Recommended for closure due to riparian management concerns, the presence of Rio Grande Cutthroat, limited access and potential conflict between recreationists and livestock.

THE DECISION

My decision is to permanently close these allotments and not to include these lands in the suitable range landbase. This decision is consistent with the Management Area Prescriptions in Alternative G which has been selected for implementation for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan.

It is important that people understand that these vacant allotments are not currently permitted to grazing. As such, closure will not affect permitted use or existing permittees.

Another important point is that if, in the future, the situations that warranted this closure should change (such as access across private land), then these allotment closures can be reviewed. If it is determined that it is appropriate to reactivate these allotments, they can be reopened via appropriate NEPA analysis.

OBJECTIVES SHARED BY ALL ALTERNATIVES

All alternatives meet the objectives established in the Rocky Mountain Regional Guide. These include:

Protect the basic soil, air, and water resources.

Provide for multiple uses and sustainability in an environmentally acceptable manner.

Provide for a variety of life through management of ecosystems.

Provide for scenic quality and a range of recreation opportunities that respond to our customers

and local communities.

Emphasize cooperation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies in coordination of planning and project implementation.

Promote rural-development opportunities.

In cooperation with other landowners, strive for improved landowner and access patterns, to the mutual benefit of both public and private landowners.

Improve the financial efficiency of all programs and projects.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The FEIS for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan examines a range of Alternatives that address varying schemes of motorized and nonmotorized trail access to the Forest. These include Alternatives NA through G as described in Chapter II of the FEIS for the Final Revised Land and Resource Management Plan.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

As the Forest Supervisor (Deciding Officer), I have considered the multitude of statutes governing management of the Rio Grande National Forest, and I believe that this decision represents the best possible approach relative to harmonizing and reconciling the current statutory duties of the Forest Service.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the proposed action in Selected Alternative G have been adopted. The specific mitigative measures and practices may be found in the FEIS for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Chapter III.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

I consider Alternative E to be the environmentally preferred alternative. I have not selected this alternative for implementation because of the reasons cited in the Record of Decision for the Revised land and Resource Management Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of this decision will occur seven calendar days following the publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Federal Register (December 13, 1996).

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, Content of Notice of Appeal, including the reasons for appeal and must be filed with:

Elizabeth Estill, Regional Forester, R-2
USDA-Forest Service
740 Simms Street
Golden, Colorado 80401-4720

within 90 days from the date the legal notice is published in the Federal Register (December 13, 1996).

Date: December 5, 1996
JAMES B. WEBB
Forest Supervisor
