

SCOPING REPORT

JAKES/LAUREL CANYON/SOUTH REEF/NORTH REEF/ GOODWIN/KANE SPRING ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLANS USDA FOREST SERVICE SAFFORD RANGER DISTRICT

Introduction

This report summarizes a Forest Service proposal to authorize grazing on, and develop allotment management plans (AMPs) for the Jakes, Laurel Canyon, South Reef, North Reef, Goodwin, and Kane Spring Allotments on the Safford Ranger District, Coronado National Forest, Graham County, Arizona. 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).

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 September 30, 2004. 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.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to authorize livestock grazing in a manner consistent with the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Authorization is needed on these allotments because:

- 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*).
- Where consistent with the goals and objectives of 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).
- By regulation, forage-producing lands will be managed for livestock grazing where consistent with land management plans (36 CFR 222.2(c)).
- The Jakes, Laurel Canyon, South Reef, North Reef, Goodwin, and Kane Spring Allotments include land identified as suitable for grazing in the Coronado National Forest LRMP.
- The allotments currently lack sufficient environmental analysis necessary to comply with the Reclamation Act (P.L. 104, 1996).

- Allotment management plans for all six allotments need to be updated.

The EA will describe the existing and desired conditions of the affected environment within the allotments, and proposed management practices will resolve any discrepancies between the two. Management practices that are approved will be incorporated into the AMP. Current knowledge regarding existing and desired conditions, and potential management practices, is described in the following sections.

Existing Condition

The analysis area encompasses six grazing allotments: Jakes, Kane Springs, Goodwin, North Reef, South Reef and Laurel Canyon. All six allotments are located within the Santa Teresa Ecosystem Management Area (EMA). Elevations range from approximately 4,000 feet in the southwest corner of the analysis area to over 7,000 feet on Cobre Grande Mountain in the north end of the EMA. Two vegetation types, chaparral and broadleaf woodland, dominate the area. Pockets of coniferous forest vegetation are found at higher elevations. In general, the allotments are steep, brushy and remote. Portions of all of the allotments are included in the Santa Teresa Wilderness. The number of permitted livestock, season of use and stocking levels over the past five years for each allotment are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Season of use, permitted numbers and stocking levels for the past 10 years on allotments in the project area.

	Jakes	Laurel Canyon	South Reef	North Reef	Goodwin	Kane Springs
Capable Acres	2,740	751	2,572	3,555	3,975	394
Permitted #	31	50	50	100	54	14
Season of use	3/1-2/28 (yearlong)	10/1-3/31 (6 months)	10/1-3/31 (6 months)	11/1-3/31 (5 months)	3/1-2/28 (yearlong)	11/1-4/30 (6 months)
(Head Months ¹)	372	300	300	500	648	84
2003-2004 (HM)	360	Rested	300	Not used	648	84
2002-2003 (HM)	360	300	Rested	Not used	648	84
2001-2002 (HM)	360	Rested	300	350	648	84
2000-2001 (HM)	503	300	Rested	500	648	84
1999-2000 (HM)	503	Rested	300	500	648	84
Maximum Stocking (Acres/HM)	7.4	2.5	8.6	7.1	6.1	4.7

Jakes: Located on the southwest side of the Santa Teresa Mountains, the Jakes Allotment contains 3,670 acres, of which 2,470 are considered capable² for livestock grazing. The allotment is grazed during the winter (December 1 to February 28 for the past two years) and receives growing season rest each year. The allotment is grazed in conjunction with adjacent

¹ Head months is calculated by multiplying the number of livestock grazed by the number of months grazing occurs.

² 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.

state and private land and the Jakes Allotment comprises a portion of larger pastures on State and private land off the Forest. There is no fence along the Forest boundary and cattle move into and out of the allotment in response to forage and water availability. Because of the lack of a boundary fence, the stocking numbers in Table 1 may not reflect actual use. There are 3 pastures. Since 1999, measured utilization has ranged from 0-20% in key areas.

Laurel Canyon and South Reef: Located north of the Jakes Allotment on the southwest face of the Santa Teresa Mountains, the Laurel Canyon Allotment consists of 2,799 acres, of which 751 are considered capable for grazing. The South Reef Allotment consists of 5,198 acres, of which 2,572 are classified as capable for grazing. The allotments are managed in combination, with winter seasonal use occurring on each allotment in alternate years (Table 1). Each allotment is grazed for three months during the winter and rested each summer growing season. Range condition is considered good and utilization in key areas has ranged from 0-35% since 1999.

North Reef: Located adjacent to the South Reef Allotment on the north face of the Santa Teresa Mountains, the North Reef Allotment consists of 6,762 acres, about 3,555 of which are classified as capable for livestock grazing. Grazing occurs in the winter and the allotment is rested every growing season. The allotment is poorly watered and has not been stocked for the past two years. Since 1999, utilization has not exceeded 20% when the allotment is grazed.

Goodwin: The Goodwin Allotment is located at the North end of the Santa Teresa Mountains and is bounded on the North by the San Carlos Indian Reservation. The allotment comprises 8,737 acres of which 3,975 are considered capable. This is the only allotment in the analysis area permitted for year-round grazing. The allotment is managed under a two-pasture deferred rotation that allows growing season rest for each pasture every other year. Since 1999, utilization in key areas has ranged from 0-25%.

Kane Springs: The Kane Springs Allotment is located in the northeast corner of the Santa Teresa EMA. It is a small allotment (698 acres, 394 capable acres). Grazing occurs during the dormant season (11/1-4/30 each year). Because the Forest boundary fence is not secure, cattle often drift down off of the Forest during the grazing season. As a consequence, use is generally light, estimated at 10% or less since 1999.

Soil, watershed and range condition on all allotments were updated in 1998 and annually since 2001. Overall, range condition on the allotments was determined to be satisfactory or better. Sites identified as being in unsatisfactory soil condition in the 1990 General Ecosystem Survey were re-evaluated in 2001 and were determined to be in satisfactory or impaired condition. Trend for the sites was determined to be stable or upward. Key areas have been established on all of the allotments and are monitored annually.

Thirteen riparian areas in the Santa Teresas Mountains were evaluated in 1998. In general all areas were determined to be functioning properly with stable or upward trend at all sites. Only Black Rock Canyon is mapped as riparian in the LRMP.

Desired Condition

The Coronado LRMP (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.

Grazing permits and allotment management plans will support these goals by using the best information available to provide for the following specific objectives, which constitute the desired condition in the analysis area:

- Grazing activities contributing to impaired soil quality are corrected.
- Occupied habitats for threatened and endangered species are maintained or improved and recovery objectives are being met.
- Grazing activities contributing to unsatisfactory riparian conditions are corrected.
- Habitats for Forest Service sensitive and management indicator species are maintained or improved.

On all six allotments, management plans are in place. Livestock distribution and utilization are consistent with LRMP goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. There appears to be little need for change from current management. AMPs need to be updated and short fences are needed in the North Reef and Jakes Allotments to improve livestock distribution.

Proposed Action

The Safford Ranger District, Coronado National Forest, proposes to authorize livestock grazing on the Jakes, Laurel Canyon, South Reef, North Reef, Goodwin and Kane Springs Allotments under the following terms and conditions:

- Forage utilization on the Jakes, Laurel Canyon, North Reef, South Reef and Kane Springs Allotments will be limited to 45% or less in designated key areas, with no more than 40% utilization on riparian trees and shrubs. Forage utilization in wilderness areas will be limited to 35% in accordance with LRMP direction.
- Forage utilization on the Goodwin Allotment will be limited to 35% or less, with no more than 30% utilization on riparian trees and shrubs.
- Season of use will be limited to the winter dormant season (October 1 to April 30) on the Jakes, Laurel Canyon, North Reef, South Reef and Kane Springs Allotments in order to provide annual growing season rest. Season of use on the Goodwin Allotment will be year-round, but management will provide growing season rest on pastures every other year.
- Specific dates of use and numbers of livestock will be determined through annual operating instructions using an adaptive management process based on resource conditions and management objectives. The number of livestock grazed will not exceed what is authorized on the permit.

Preliminary Issues

On May 9 & 10, 2000, a Coronado National Forest interdisciplinary (ID) team met with Safford District staff to discuss the six allotments. Information needs were identified and the District collected monitoring data during 2001 and 2002. The ID team met again on November 7, 2003 to develop a proposed action and identify preliminary issues and measures to carry forward into the analysis.

- **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.
- **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.

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

A minimum of two alternatives will be evaluated for the allotments. One of these alternatives (No Action) discontinues livestock use of the allotments. The Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations (40 CFR 1502.14) require that a no action alternative be developed to serve as a benchmark for the analysis. The Forest Service Handbook (FSH 2209.13) identifies no grazing as the no action alternative. The second alternative continues the current management of the allotments and is the proposed action. Further alternatives will be developed if additional issues are raised that are not addressed by either of the two alternatives.

Alternative 1: No Action (No Grazing)

Under this alternative, use of the grazing allotments by domestic livestock would be discontinued. The current permittees would have two years from the date of notification to remove all livestock. All existing structural improvements including water developments would remain in place but would not be maintained. Periodic monitoring of structural improvements (at least once every ten years) will be used to determine whether removal or maintenance is needed. Removal or maintenance would be authorized by a separate decision.

Alternative 2: Continue Current Management – The Proposed Action

Under this alternative, livestock grazing would continue to be authorized as currently permitted on the six allotments and as described under Proposed Action, above.

Decision to be Made

The Safford 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 AMP, including allotment boundaries, season of use, livestock facilities to be constructed, and

term of the permit. Separate decisions may be made for each allotment or for all three 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. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.5, additional opportunities for public and agency review of the project will occur as the NEPA review progresses. The expected date of completion of the analysis is September 2004.

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) 670-4503, rgerhart@fs.fed.us. To obtain details about the proposal, please contact Chuck Duncan, Range Management Staff, Safford Ranger District (928-428-4150).