



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Prescott National Forest

344 South Cortez  
Prescott, AZ 86303  
Phone: (928) 443-8000  
Fax: (928) 443-8008  
TTY: (928) 443-8001

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File Code: 1570-1/2200

Date: May 4, 2004

Jim Powers  
Prescott National Forest Friends  
P.O. Box 10642  
Prescott, AZ 86034

**CERTIFIED MAIL – RETURN  
RECEIPT REQUESTED**

RE: Appeals #04-03-09-00-06 through 10-A215, Antelope Hills, Sand Flat, Perkinsville, Muldoon, and China Dam Allotment Decisions, Chino Ranger District, Prescott National Forest

Dear Mr. Powers:

This is my review decision concerning the appeal you filed regarding the Decision Notices and Findings of No Significant Impact, which authorize grazing and implement the grazing management strategy on the above-named allotments.

### **BACKGROUND**

District Ranger Jackson issued 5 decisions on February 2, 2004, for the above-named Allotments. The decisions resulted in the selection of the following alternatives and authorization:

- Antelope Hills Allotment, Alternative 5, which authorizes 936-1200 animal unit months (cow/calf) to graze a variable season between 1/1 and 12/31 annually.
- Sand Flat Allotment, Alternative 5, which authorizes a range of 280–300 head of cattle (cow/calf) to graze from approximately 12/18 to 5/15 annually.
- Perkinsville Allotment, Alternative 5, which authorizes a maximum of 3192 animal unit months (cow/calf) to graze October 15–June 15 annually.
- Muldoon Allotment, Alternative 5, which authorizes 131-170 head of cattle (cow/calf) to graze a variable season between 1/1 and 12/31 annually.
- China Dam Allotment, Alternative 5, which authorizes 160 head of cattle (cow/calf) to graze 11/1-5/31 annually.

The District Ranger is identified as the Responsible Official, whose decisions are subject to administrative review under 36 CFR 215 appeal regulations. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.17, an attempt was made to seek informal resolution of your appeals. The record indicates that informal resolution was not reached.



My review of this appeal has been conducted in accordance with 36 CFR 215.18. I have reviewed the appeal record and the recommendation of the Appeal Reviewing Officer. My review decision incorporates the appeal record.

Since one analysis was done for the group of allotments and the appellant's issues are the same for all allotments, the five appeals have been combined for one response.

**APPEAL REVIEWING OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION**

The Appeal Reviewing Officer concluded that: a) decision logic and rationale were generally clearly disclosed; b) the benefits of the proposals were identified; c) the proposals and decisions are consistent with agency policy, direction and supporting information; d) public participation and response to comments were adequate.

**APPEAL DECISION**

After a detailed review of the record and the Appeal Reviewing Officer's recommendation, I affirm the Responsible Official's decisions concerning the above-named allotments, which authorize grazing and implementation of management actions.

My decision constitutes the final administrative determination of the Department of Agriculture [36 CFR 215.18(c.)].

Sincerely,

/s/ Mike Baca  
MIKE BACA  
Appeal Deciding Officer  
Deputy Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: David M Stewart, Berwyn Brown, Constance J Smith, Linda L Jackson, Joy Kimmel

**REVIEW AND FINDINGS**

of

**Prescott National Forest Friends'****Appeals #04-03-09-0006 through 0010-A215****Antelope Hills, Sand Flat, Perkinsville, Muldoon, and China Dam Allotments**

**ISSUE 1:** NEPA: Grazing impacts to soil and watershed resources with past and projected long-term impacts were inappropriately analyzed, therefore an EIS is required.

**Contention:** Cumulative effects were not analyzed to watersheds since only a 10-year permit was analyzed and soil and watershed effects can last longer. Past and current range management was not taken into account for soil and watershed conditions.

**Response:** RMS (Rangeland Management Status) information shows trends in plant communities that were analyzed for the EA (EA PR#557 pages 1-2, 1-3, and under PR#479 see document 25). Current condition of existing vegetation and soils analysis is discussed in PR#52, #119, #135, and #136. Grazing impacts on vegetation and effects to wildlife are discussed in PR#459. Both the response to comments by soils and watershed (PR#521) and the soils and watershed report (PR#545) addresses grazing effects on soils directly. The direct and indirect effects of grazing on soils were evaluated regardless of other variables. Effects of grazing on soils is not limited to a 10 year time frame, but is evaluated over the long-term (EA page 3-23). Watershed effects and function are affected by soil condition at a landscape scale (EA page 3-24). The effects of alternatives on soils, riparian areas, and watersheds on the Prescott and Kaibab National Forests are described on EA pages 3-24 through 3-39.

**Finding:** Grazing impacts on soil and watershed were adequately analyzed and displayed for public review in the EA and record. No significant impacts are expected, therefore an EIS is not required.

**ISSUE 2:** Soils were not adequately evaluated for effects from livestock grazing, and applicable policies on soils and watershed management and grazing were not followed.

**Contention 1:** Soil and watershed protection objectives from the Soil Management Handbook (FSH 2509.18) were not incorporated into either the Prescott Plan, or into the EA analysis for this project.

**Response:** Concerns regarding incorporation of Forest Service Handbook guidance into the Prescott National Forest Plan are outside the scope of this decision. Guidance contained in FSH 2509.18 regarding objectives, policy and responsibilities related to assessing, evaluating and monitoring soil resources to detect significant changes in soil condition is reflected in the analysis record for this project. (PR# 557, p. 3-23 to p. 3-29, p. 3-36 to p. 3-47, PR# 545, p.2-22)

**Finding:** Soil and watershed protection objectives and guidance contained in FSH 2509.18 were followed.

**Contention 2:** No thresholds were established for various soil and watershed measures, therefore context and significance of effects cannot be evaluated in the EA.

**Response:** There is no requirement to establish quantitative thresholds for individual soil properties. In the planning for this project, the interdisciplinary team established a project-wide objective to enhance soil condition. This objective became a rationale for alternative selection and the degree and rate of soil and water condition improvement or decline for each alternative were qualitatively evaluated and formed a basis for comparison (PR# 557, p. 3-23 to p. 3-29). The alternative selected (PR# 556) provides for continued or accelerated soil condition improvement.

**Finding:** The analysis adequately evaluated the context and significance of environmental effects on soil and water.

**Contention 3:** Project has no monitoring of soil quality changes as required by FSM 2554.03, long-term productivity as required by FSH 2509.18, or watershed monitoring that would evaluate trends.

**Response:** Soil condition monitoring requirements are described in the EA (PR# 557, p. 2-10) and affirmed in each allotment decision (PR# 556).

**Finding:** The project provides for soil quality/ soil condition monitoring.

**Contention 4:** The project Decision Notice does not meet Plan standards for soils and watershed such as doing watershed plans (Plan page 48), and showing improvement in condition of watersheds (Plan page 4).

**Response:** A watershed assessment was completed (PR# 546) for the watersheds affected by this project. Improvement of watershed condition is described in the EA (PR# 557) for each allotment as part of the soil and water effects anticipated for Alternative 5.

**Finding:** The decision meets Forest plan standards for watershed planning and improvement.

**ISSUE 3:** Range analysis is inadequate.

**Contention 1:** The decision was made using only grazing utilization standards, not the full spectrum of soil and water objectives, therefore project does not meet Plan direction (Plan page 42).

**Response:** Proper forage utilization standards are employed to sustain such things as plant health and vigor, long-term soil productivity, and protection for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and their habitats. Forage utilization levels are determined based on guidelines set out in the R-3 Allotment Analysis Guidelines. These guidelines specifically describe appropriate forage utilization levels recommended for the purpose of improving rangeland condition. Southwestern Region Rangeland Management Specialists, Ecologists, and other scientists have developed these guidelines over a period of 50 years.

In addition, the utilization standards were derived using soil, water, vegetative health and other considerations. See the discussion under Issue 2 for a description of how soil and watershed protection objectives were incorporated into the project analysis.

**Finding:** The proposed action meets Forest Plan direction.

**Contention 2:** Project fails to address 46 percent unsatisfactory range condition on five allotments.

**Response:** The record documents that current rangeland management status (RMS) takes into account the current plant communities compared to the desired plant communities, and then looks at the trend towards the desired communities. Broadly, the RMS is a summary of whether management is successfully moving rangeland resources toward the objectives (PR. 557). RMS ratings for the five allotments varies between 100 and 79 percent. The development of alternatives considered soil and water conservation practices including grazing capability, stocking levels, livestock distribution, management systems, utilization standards, and season of use (Appendix 3). The Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey was used to determine site potentials and grazing capability. No grazing capacity was assigned to unsatisfactory soils (PR#479 and 519). A detailed description of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on vegetation, soils, and water are found on pages 3-6 through 3-48 of the environmental assessment. The effects analysis is supported by many specialist reports in the project record.

**Finding:** The record contains a balanced analysis of the effects of the proposed action on vegetation, soil, and water resources.

**Contention 3:** Project fails to balance livestock with capacity as required by Plan (Plan page 4).

**Response:** The forest plan requirement the appellant references is a forest-wide standard and is outside the scope of this analysis.

**Finding:** The proposed action meets Forest Plan direction.

**Contention 4:** Project fails to calculate that forage benefits are being provided commensurate with costs, as required by Plan (Plan Management area objectives- Range).

**Response:** During the preparation of the Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, the economic and environmental consequences of alternative uses of the Prescott National Forest were analyzed, in accordance with 36 CFR 219.12. This included an estimate of the expected real-dollar costs including investment, administrative, and operating costs of the agency and all other public and private costs required to manage the forest up to the point where the outputs are valued and the environmental consequences are realized. The economic effects of alternatives, including impacts on present net value, total receipts to the Federal Government, direct benefits to users that are not measured in receipts to the Federal Government, receipt shares to State and local governments, income, and employment in affected areas were also estimated.

**Finding:** There are no requirements in either Forest Service regulations or policy requiring specific rangeland management project proposals to balance costs with dollar returns to the treasury.