# Decision Memo

# Twin Tanks Grazing Allotment Management Plan

USDA Forest Service
Williams Ranger District, Kaibab National Forest
Coconino County, Arizona

## Background

The Twin Tanks Allotment is on the Williams Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest (see Maps 1 and 2). Grasslands, pinyon/juniper and ponderosa pine dominate the vegetation on the Twin Tanks Allotment at an elevation ranging from 6,400 to 9,300 feet.

Allotment management follows a deferred rotation grazing system, which is managed by a herder with typically one band of sheep. Current permitted use for the allotment allows up to 1025 head of sheep from 5/21-10/20 and 30 head of rams from 6/11-7/11, which are 1037 Animal Unit Months (AUM's) and 5187 Head Months (HM's).

The Twin Tanks Allotment is located approximately seven miles northeast of Williams, Arizona, approximately two miles northeast of Red Lake Valley, and approximately two miles west of Spring Valley (Map 1). The allotment runs from Cedar Mountain on the west side to Sitgreaves Mountain on the southeast corner. The allotment is located in all or in parts of T23N, R4E, Sections 6-7, 18-19, and 30; and T23N R3E, Sections 1-18, 22-27.

## Decision

I have decided to re-authorize grazing for up to 1025 head of sheep from 5/21-10/20 and 30 head of rams from 6/11-7/11, which are 1037 Animal Unit Months (AUM's) and 5187 Head Months (HM's) on the Twin Tanks Allotment. Allotment management would continue to follow a deferred rotation grazing system, which is managed by a herder with typically one band of sheep. The authorization would be through a term grazing permit and includes the following features:

Utilization: The current utilization guideline[1] would continue to allow up to 35 percent use by sheep and/or wildlife at the end of the grazing season. This includes "conservative" grazing intensity which is measured before the end of the growing season and is used in determining when sheep need to move to the next area, in consideration of other factors such as weather patterns, likelihood of plant regrowth, and previous years' utilization levels. Sheep would move to the next area when grazing intensity approaches a conservative level (40%) before August 30. That area would not be grazed again during the grazing season.

[1] Utilization is the proportion or degree of current year's forage production that is consumed or destroyed by animals (including insects). It is a comparison of the amount of herbage left compared with the amount of herbage produced during the year. Utilization is measured at the end of the growing season when the total annual production can be accounted for, and the effects of grazing in the whole management unit can be assessed. Utilization guidelines are intended to indicate a level of use or desired stocking rate to be achieved over a period of years.

If adaptive management adjustments are needed, the range specialist will develop these modifications in collaboration with the permittee(s), and others as appropriate. Livestock management would be modified to improve the downward trend through a possible reduction of numbers, shorter graze periods, increasing area rest periods, or eliminating livestock grazing entirely. Such changes will not exceed the limits for timing, intensity, duration, and frequency defined in this Decision Memo. The modifications would be implemented through the Annual Operating Instructions. An example of a situation that could call for adaptive management adjustments is drought conditions.

Monitoring: The type and frequency for monitoring the Twin Tanks Allotment will occur as funding is available and will include:

- permittee compliance, allotment inspections, range readiness, forage production, rangeland utilization (annually)
- condition and trend (every five to ten years)
- frequency and canopy cover plots and a soil condition rating will be completed at long-term monitoring sites throughout the allotment (every five to ten years), if improved methods are developed these new methods will be considered.

## Decision Rationale

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under Section 339 of the FY 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-447). The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because this action meets the provisions outlined in the Appropriations Act as follows:

**1) The decision continues current grazing management.**

My decision continues current livestock numbers and grazing management, as described in the "Background" section of this Decision Memo.

**2) Monitoring indicates that current grazing management is meeting, or satisfactorily moving the area toward, objectives in the land and resource management plan, as determined by the Secretary.**

The Twin Tanks Allotment includes the following Management Area (MA): MA 2 Coniferous Forest and some Coniferous Forest Woodland. Existing condition information described below indicates rangeland conditions on the allotment are being maintained or improved with the current sheep grazing management. Continued monitoring will help managers to evaluate the status of maintaining and improving rangeland conditions (Range Report).

Our records show no utilization over the 35 percent guideline established for the allotment (1986 Allotment Management Plan).

Permitted sheep numbers, under the current grazing management system, fall within the carrying capacity of the allotment (61 percent of current estimates). Carrying capacity for this analysis is based on: actual use data, condition and trend monitoring, sheep and wildlife use patterns, sheep health and condition, soil surveys (Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey), forage production estimates, and professional opinion.

The trend for Twin Tanks Allotment is generally static and stable for range and soil conditions since 1960. A reduction in cool season grass species is following trend found throughout the Forest in grazed and ungrazed areas. The cool season grass reduction is most likely caused by a decrease in winter moisture and an increase in warm season grasses.

One monitoring transect was established on the Twin Tanks Allotment in 1960. Twelve paced transects were done in the fall of 2007. All monitoring sites have either a static or upward trend.

These range condition trends exist under the current sheep grazing system and within the current utilization guideline for sheep and wildlife. Grazing has remained within this utilization guideline and sheep have been able to use the area for the full length of the grazing season. Sheep must be moved early if the grazing intensity level is reached prior to planned rotations, or sheep may not enter an area if grazing intensity from wildlife already meets the grazing intensity guideline (see page 1, utilization). However, wildlife grazing has not been that high on this allotment. The current permittee has been very responsive to drought by reducing sheep use.

Soil condition status is obtained from the Kaibab National Forest Terrestrial Ecosystems Survey (TES) (USDA 1995). Based on TES predictions and field surveys, satisfactory, impaired, and unsatisfactory soils exist on the Twin Tanks Allotment. Of 11,938 acres on the allotment, 10,496 acres are in satisfactory soil/watershed condition (88%); 0 acres are impaired (0%); and 1,442 acres are in unsatisfactory condition (12%). This data was collected for the TES from 1979 to 1986. Range monitoring throughout the area shows soil condition have improved since the original surveys were completed, so today it is expected that the number of acres in satisfactory condition will be the same or better.

Based on this information and the project record (which includes monitoring information), I find my decision is consistent with the 1987 Kaibab National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (Forest Plan Consistency Report).

**3) There are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment.**

I considered the following resource conditions in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warranted further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3):

- Threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat: The District Wildlife Biologist has determined the project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" Mexican spotted owl and it critical habitat (Biological Assessment). This determination is based on criteria outlined in the Framework for Streamlining Informal Consultation for Livestock Grazing Activities (USDA 2005). The determination is appropriate, as all two of the following criteria are met:
    - Livestock grazing and livestock management activities within foraging habitat will be managed for levels that provide the woody and herbaceous vegetation necessary for cover for rodent prey species, and maintain the residual biomass that will support prescribed natural and ignited fires that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the Forest.
    - In owl foraging areas, forage utilization will be maintained at conservative levels (30-40%).

Given the current utilization standards the proposed action is unlikely to result in adverse affects to Mexican spotted owls (Wildlife Report).

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: There are no flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds in the project area.
- Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas: There are no congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas in the project area.
- Inventoried roadless areas: There are no inventoried roadless areas in the project area.
- Research Natural Areas: There are no research natural areas in the project area.
- Native American areas of traditional cultural importance, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas: 13 Native American tribes were consulted and none of them have expressed concern with the project. An archeological survey and clearance report was completed no effects to archeological resources or sites are anticipated (Archeology Report).

The project record, located at the Williams Ranger District, contains further documentation supporting the findings of no extraordinary circumstances. In reviewing the project record, I have determined the analysis considered the best available science.

## Public Involvement

This project has been listed in the Kaibab National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since April 2008. On April 28, 2008, a detailed Proposed Action with maps was mailed to 45 interested individuals/groups for a 30-day scoping period. Also in March, 2008, 13 Native American tribes were consulted about this project. Two responses were received for this project. These comments were reviewed and analyzed for significant issues (Comment Analysis Report). No significant issues were raised for this project.

## Compliance with Other Laws

In addition to meeting Kaibab Forest Plan standards and guidelines, this project is also consistent with the following:

- Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands (Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, National Forest Management Act of 1976).
- Forest Service policy on rangeland management (FSM 2202.1, FSM 2203.1).
- Federal regulation (36 CFR 222.2 (c)) which states that National Forest System lands will be allocated for livestock grazing and these allotment management plans will be prepared consistent with land management plans, and the Clean Water Act of 1948, Clean Air Act of 1955, Endangered Species Act of 1973, and 13186 (Conservation of Migratory Birds), and National Historic Preservation Act 1966, as amended.
- Authorization of livestock grazing permits for a ten-year period is required by law (FLPMA Sec. 402 (a)&(b) (3) and 36 CFR 222.3), unless there is pending disposal, or it will be devoted to other

uses prior to the end of ten years, or it will be in best interest of sound land management to specify a shorter term.

## Implementation Date

This project can be implemented immediately following the decision date. The decision may be implemented during the permittee appeal period, unless the Reviewing Officer grants a stay under 251.91.

## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

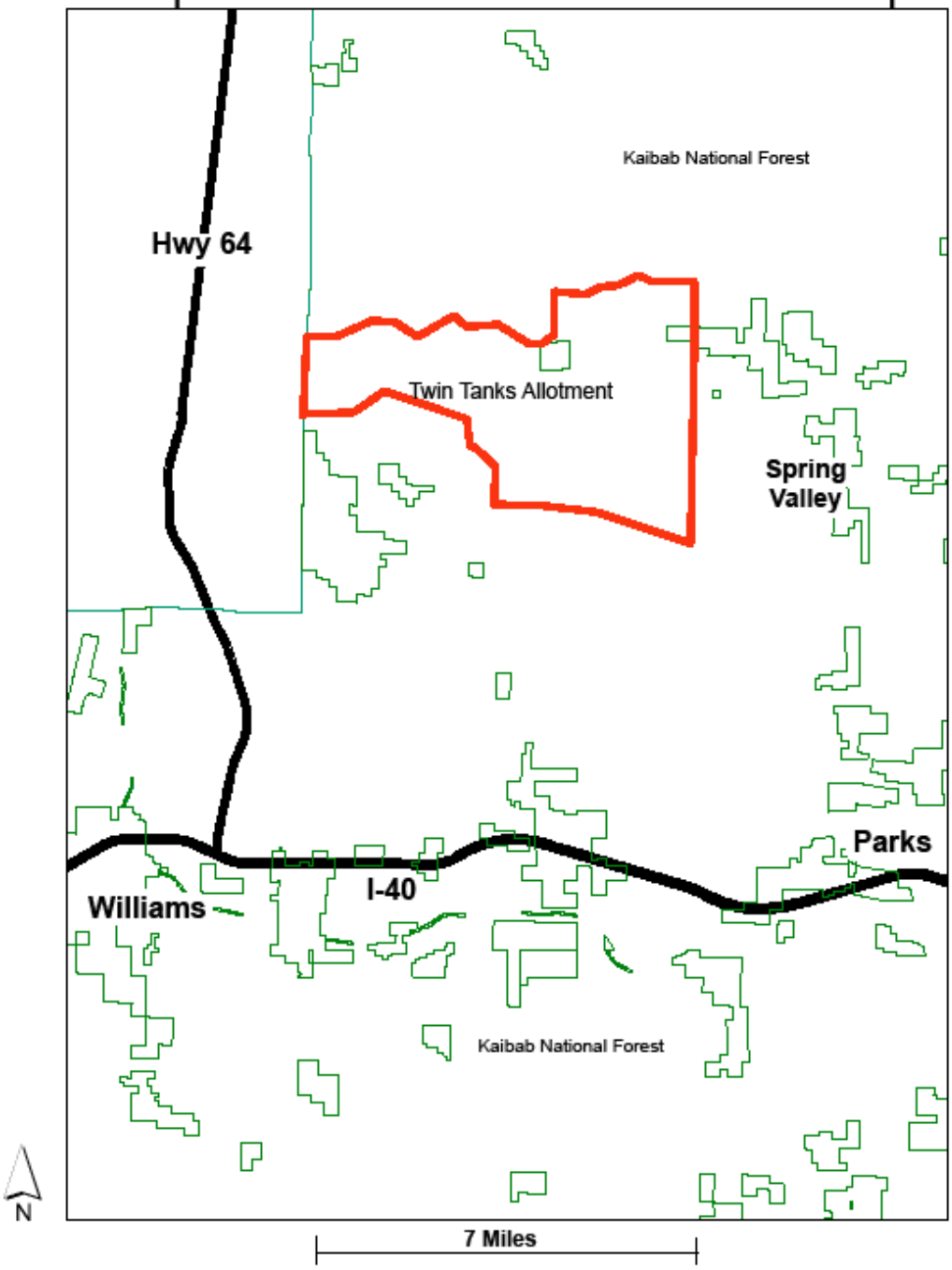
This decision is not subject to administrative appeal under 36 CFR 215.12(f). The Twin Tanks Allotment permittee may appeal the decision under 36 CFR 251. A Notice of Appeal must be consistent with 36 CFR 251.90 and filed simultaneously with Mike Williams, Appeal Reviewing Officer, ATTN: Twin Tanks Appeal, Kaibab National Forest, 800 S. 6th St, Williams, AZ 86046; and Martie Schramm, Deciding Officer, Williams Ranger District, 742 S. Clover Rd, Williams, AZ 86046 within 45 days from the date of the decision.

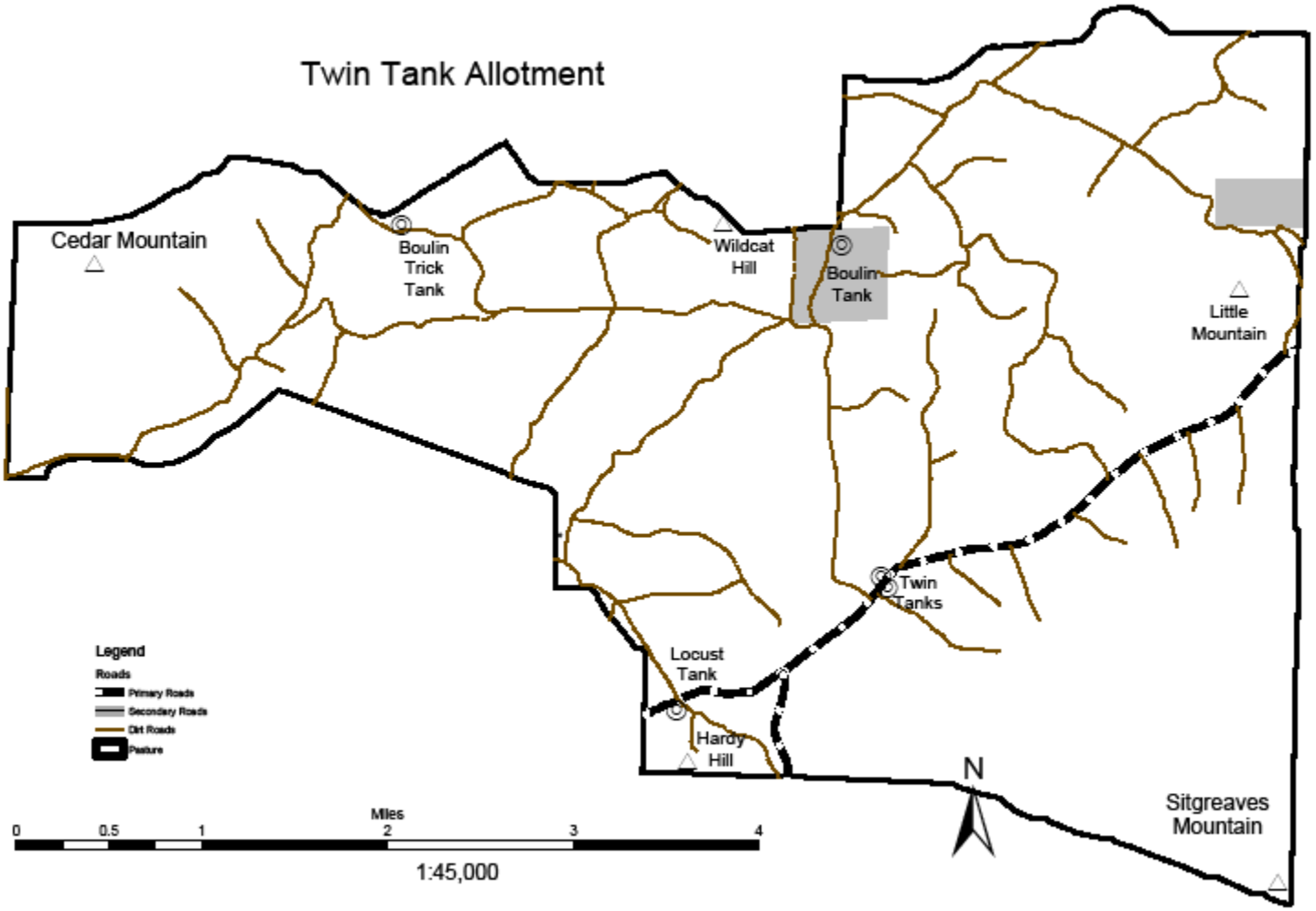
## Contact Person

For additional information concerning my decision, please contact Mike Hannemann, Range and Watershed Staff Officer for the Kaibab National Forest at (928) 635-8200.

Martie Schramm Date
District Ranger

## Map 1. Twin Tanks Allotment Location Map




Twin Tank Allotment
Cedar Mountain
Boulin Trick Tank
Wildcat Hill
Boulin Tank
Little Mountain
Twin Tanks
Locust Tank
Hardy Hill
Sitgreaves Mountain
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Roads
Primary Roads
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