



File Code: 1950, 2200

Date: February 25, 2008

Subject: Scoping Letter for Management of Eight Grazing Allotments in the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area

To: Interested Parties

Scoping - Opportunity to Comment

Management of Eight Grazing Allotments in the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area:

**Allegheny; Alvin Shreve; Andy Champ; Grant Alt; Hartman Heirs;
Mallow Tract; Mowery-Glover; and Smokehole-Champ**

The Forest Service is proposing to authorize eight grazing allotments in the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area on the Cheat Potomac Ranger District of the Monongahela National Forest.

Please take a few minutes to review the following information and provide your comments about proposed activities.

Your comments will be used to identify relevant issues. They will help guide environmental analysis and documentation. Please be as specific as possible when responding. If you provide data or research results, please identify why the information is pertinent to management of the allotments, and provide a copy of the information.

For additional information about this activity, or to provide comments, please contact Kristine Vollmer, NEPA Coordinator for the project. You can reach her at the Cheat Potomac Ranger District, HC 59, Box 240, Petersburg, West Virginia, 26847; or by phone at 304-257-4488, extension 24. You may also email comments to comments-eastern-monongahela-potomac@fs.fed.us. Please include the activity name in the subject line of the e-mail.

To best use your comments, please provide them within 30 days of the date of this letter. If you do not wish to comment at this time, but would like to continue receiving information about this project, please let us know. Additional information about this project will be mailed to those people who have submitted comments during the analysis process and to those who request additional information.

Also let us know what format you prefer to receive information in: hard copy; e-mail; or CD. It is the responsibility of interested parties to respond to this notice within the established time period. No means of communication is perfect. Please contact our 'for additional information' address above if a document is not available or delivered at the expected time, to ascertain its availability, and if necessary, to arrange an alternate delivery method.



Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed activity, and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted only anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments may not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215.

Location

The eight allotments are located in the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area (SK-SR NRA). They are located on the Potomac portion of the Cheat Potomac Ranger District, Monongahela National Forest (MNF) in Grant and Pendleton Counties, West Virginia (see Figure 1, Range Allotment Vicinity Map).

Purpose and Need for Action

The decision resulting from this environmental analysis will guide the Forest Service on how to manage these allotments in the future, including grazing techniques, improvement of the allotments and associated facilities, and protection of sensitive resources.

The Rescissions Act of 1995 mandates that the Forest Service (FS) have all grazing allotments in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) by 2010.

The Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (page II-44) directs the FS to maintain or improve existing range allotments by:

- Managing grazing allotments to provide open areas for forage, wildlife habitat, visual diversity, and dispersed recreation,
- Establishing grazing capacities based on the Adaptive Management strategies as outlined in Chapter 90 of FSH 2209.13,
- Refining or implementing more appropriate grazing systems,
- Applying lime and fertilizer where needed,
- Seeding to improve vegetation quality, and/or
- Selectively controlling undesirable vegetation, such as brush or non-native invasive species.

Some allotment and site-specific needs and opportunities have already been identified (see Table 1). Additional needs and opportunities will be identified through future monitoring. Monitoring will be tied to Forest Plan (2006) desired conditions, standards, guidelines, goals, and objectives, as well as other direction application to these allotments and areas. Implementation of activities will depend on the priorities of the specific needs and funding and partnerships available.

Proposed Activities

The Cheat Potomac Ranger District is proposing to continue grazing where appropriate and to make improvements to eight allotments as needed.

Proposed activities that may be implemented include the following, as needed:

- Continue to use livestock grazing as a vegetation management tool to assist in maintaining these areas in a relatively open, non-forested, herbaceous condition.
- Establish grazing capacities.
- Eliminate grazing in areas not suitable for grazing or where impacts are not acceptable.
- Construct, repair, and/or replace structural improvements such as fences and corrals as needed. Fences may be used to control livestock movements or control access, to protect streams and riparian areas, or to protect historic buildings and cemeteries. Black locust up to 5 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) within allotments may be cut during the winter hibernation period for Indiana bats to be used as fence posts.
- Apply lime and fertilizer to selected areas to improve soil productivity and vegetation types.
- Seed and plant species beneficial to livestock and/or wildlife.
- Mow, chainsaw lop, or use hand tools as needed to selectively control weed and brush invasion.
- Control hawthorne and noxious weeds via brush cutting, mowing, and herbicide application.
- Use herbicides to control hawthorne and noxious, non-native, invasive, or poisonous brush and weeds. More than one application may be needed. For most undesirable species and most herbicides, only individual basal spray treatments or spot applications would be used on an as-needed basis. In rare situations, broadcast spraying may be used if needed (see sethoxydim discussion in following list). Proposed herbicides are:
 - Glyphosate: for control of bush honeysuckles and a variety of other undesirable species;
 - triclopyr (Garlon, Crossbow): for control of brush and broadleaf weeds, multi-flora rose, hawthorne, and autumn olive;
 - aminopyralid: broadleaf specific control;
 - sethoxydim (Poast): grass specific, for control of NNIS/poor forage grasses like sweet vernal grass (this is a good example of a possible need for broadcast spraying – sweet vernal grass can take over a pasture very quickly);
 - sulfometuron methyl (Oust): for fern control;
 - clopyralid: for control of knapweeds
 - picloram: for control of knapweeds
- Use prescribed burning to reintroduce the ecological role of fire in appropriate locations and to maintain or enhance palatable vegetation for livestock and wildlife.
- Develop new and maintain existing water developments such as ponds, springs, and troughs, and hardening access points to streams.
- Fix roads accessing or within allotments to improve access. Obliterate or rehabilitate unneeded roads.

- Fix, create, or obliterate trails to minimize or eliminate negative environmental impacts.
- Obtain easements where needed to access allotments.
- Monitor allotments to determine which activities should be implemented, the effectiveness of management practices, and whether management practices should be modified (adaptive management).

So far, surveys and monitoring have identified the site-specific needs, opportunities, and potential activities in Table 1. Future monitoring is expected to identify additional needs and opportunities. Note that some potential activities identified may be the responsibility of organizations or individuals other than the Forest Service.

Table 1. Site-Specific Allotment Information

Allotment Name	Map Figure #	Acres	Current #/Type of Animal	Needs, Opportunities, & Potential Activities Identified
Allegheny	Figure 2	35	3 horses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct a pond downstream of a spring to provide a water source for livestock and wildlife. • Replace or reconstruct the fence around the old homestead to protect it. • Fence out a section of stream to protect riparian and aquatic resources.
Alvin Shreve	Figure 3	96	8 cow/calf pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a water structure, such as a hardened crossing, to reduce riparian impacts. • Develop a single new stock trail to replace the multiple trails scattered across a steep slope to reduce erosion. • Rehabilitate an old woods road that has deep ruts to reduce erosion. • Fence a riparian area to protect aquatic and riparian resources. • Add lime because of low pH (acidic) soil to improve soil productivity.
Andy Champ	Figure 4	199	25 cow/calf pairs, 1 bull	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove old barbed and woven wire fences that are no longer needed. • Construct new pond to water livestock and wildlife. • Reconstruct or maintain two existing ponds. • Get easement to better access the allotment. • Maintain fence around cemetery to protect it.

Allotment Name	Map Figure #	Acres	Current #/Type of Animal	Needs, Opportunities, & Potential Activities Identified
Grant-Alt	Figure 5	125	31 cow/calf pairs, 1 bull	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstruct pond at entrance to private inholding. • Fix enclosure fence around pond and develop water point for livestock. • Maintain all 3 ponds for water for livestock and wildlife. • Gravel and maintain road that is a ROW to private land to reduce erosion. • Maintain enclosure fence around weather station to protect it.
Hartman Heirs	Figure 6	47	17 cow/calf pairs, 1 bull	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain spring development for livestock and wildlife. • Rebuild old pond just outside allotment fence. • Move fence to include pond so livestock have access. • Rebuild north end fence, putting in crossing stiles to allow hunters and recreationists to cross. • Remove fence wire from cross fence in NW corner.
Mallow Tract	Figure 7	306	125 yearling steers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstruct 3 ponds and create a livestock watering point. • Reconstruct fence around cemetery. • Take measures to control erosion from existing road that is revegetating.
Mowery-Glover	Figure 8	161	35 cow/calf pairs, 1 bull	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain spring development and reconstruct 2 waterholes in upper pasture. • Maintain fence around Glover homestead and pond in upper pasture. • Reconstruct pond at the homestead. • Maintain riparian fence in lower pasture. • Treat multiflora rose.
Smokehole Champ	Figure 9	106	12 cow/calf pairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain fence around cemetery. • Reconstruct pond in south pasture to provide water for livestock and wildlife. • Construct riparian fencing, with a hardened crossing, to keep livestock off the creek if the pond proves reliable. • Add lime because of low pH (acidic) soil to improve soil productivity, especially in north pasture.
TOTAL		1,075		

Decision To Be Made

The decision to be made is:

- whether to implement the proposed action as described above;
- to vary the treatments based on issues generated through scoping;
- to meet the purpose and need for action through some other combination of activities;
- or to defer any action at this time.

The decision for this project is expected to be made in September of 2008.

Public Involvement

This project will be listed for the first time in the 2008 2nd quarterly issue (April 1 to June 30) of the Monongahela National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) and will continue to be listed each quarter until a decision is made. The SOPA is available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf/> under “Forest Planning”.

Scoping (early public involvement) for this project is being initiated with this letter and with the publication of a legal notice in the *Grant County Press*, the newspaper of record for this project.

We expect to complete our environmental analysis and make a decision by September, 2008. When this information is available, a formal public notice will be given in the form of a legal notice which will be published in the *Grant County Press*. Individuals or organizations who previously provided comments on this project or indicated that they would like additional information on this project will also be notified.

I look forward to your participation in the management of the Monongahela National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kristine E. Vollmer

(for)

JEFFERY J. HAMMES

Cheat Potomac District Ranger



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